Economy and job market poised for a strong 2025

Growth could be held back as Trump policies take shape, forecasters say. **In Money**

Adrien Brody recalls going to extremes for 'Pianist'

Oscar winner talks about how his approach to new movie "Brutalist" was different. **In Life**

USA TODAY

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FREEMAN BY MATT CASHORE/IMAGN IMAGES; FRANKLIN BY MARK J. REBILAS/IMAGN IMAGES

Why this moment will be historic in sports

Marcus Freeman, top, or James Franklin will be the first Black head coach in FBS title game. This should be celebrated, columnist says. **In Sports**

EXCLUSIVE EXIT INTERVIEW PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN

Biden says yes, he could have won reelection

"I hope that history says that I came in and I had a plan how to restore the economy and reestablish America's leadership," Joe Biden says. JOSH MORGAN/USA TODAY

Susan Page USA TODAY

WASHINGTON – President Joe Biden, both reflective and defensive as he discussed his legacy, told USA TODAY he believes he could have won his reelection bid – but isn't sure he would have had the vigor to complete four more years in the Oval Office.

In an exit interview about policy, politics and family, the president said he hasn't decided whether to take one more momentous action before he leaves office in two weeks: preemptive pardons, something only three presidents have done before.

A fire crackled in the fireplace on a cold Sunday afternoon, a massive portrait of FDR hanging above the mantle. Sitting at the historic Resolute desk, his presidential hero in his line of sight, the 46th president seemed determined to define his own record in office, and he discussed what he might do in his final days.

Biden said he is considering preemptive pardons for public figures such as former Republican congresswoman Liz Cheney and former senior health official Dr. Anthony Fauci who have been threatened with investigation and prosecution by incoming president Donald Trump.

President opens up on pardons, his talk with Trump, his legacy and his regrets

Saying goodbye to Jimmy Carter

Biden shares how the former president asked him to deliver his eulogy. **3A**

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- Biden explains what led him to change his mind and pardon his son
- Biden says he urged President-elect Trump not to "settle scores"

When Biden met with Trump in the Oval Office a week after the November election, he urged the president-elect not to go forward with threats to target those who have criticized him or, in Cheney's case, helped lead efforts to impeach him.

"I tried to make clear that there was no need, and it was counterintuitive for his interest to go back and try to settle scores," Biden said. How did Trump respond? "He didn't say, 'No, I'm going to …' You know. He didn't reinforce it. He just basically listened."

Biden said his decision would be based "a little bit" on whom Trump names to top administration roles. The president-elect has chosen former Florida attorney general Pam Bondi as his nominee to head the Justice Department and firebrand loyalist Kash Patel to head the FBI.

It has been more than a half-century since Joseph Robinette Biden, a garrulous 28-year-old lawyer, won his first election by ousting a Republican incumbent for a seat on the New Castle County Council in Delaware. Now, at 82 and after 35 years in the U.S. Senate, eight years as vice president and four as president, he

See BIDEN, Page 3A

Astronomers ID record number of stars in distant galaxy

"This groundbreaking discovery demonstrates, for the first time, that studying large numbers of individual stars in a distant galaxy is possible."

Fengwu Sun
Study co-author

Light from a distant spiral galaxy known as the Dragon Arc, in the lower center of this image from the Hubble telescope, has been stretched into a long arc by Abell 370, an intervening galaxy cluster. More recent images from the Webb telescope have been used to identify 44 individual stars in the galaxy. PROVIDED BY NASA

Eric Lagatta USA TODAY

Astronomers setting their sights halfway across the observable universe recently identified the largest amount of individual stars ever detected so far away – a feat once considered near-impossible.

To make the historic discovery, the team of researchers turned to NASA's James Webb Space Telescope and its high-resolution power to reveal 44 individual stars in a galaxy so far away, that its light dates back to when the universe was half its age.

The discovery marks the largest number of individual stars ever detected in the distant universe. The team's findings, which were published Monday in the journal Nature, also unveil a method of investigating dark matter, which remains one of the universe's greatest mysteries, study co-author Fengwu Sun said.

"This groundbreaking discovery demonstrates, for

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CBP: Migrant encounters dip to 5-year low

2 sites see majority of crossings in early 2025

Lauren Villagran
USA TODAY

Illegal immigration at the U.S.-Mexico border dropped to a five-year low this week, amid the holidays and the Biden administration's ongoing efforts to contain unlawful crossings at the border.

U.S. Border Patrol logged an average of 1,000 daily migrant encounters in the seven days that ended on Sunday along the U.S.-Mexico border, a senior U.S. Customs and Border Protection official told USA TODAY on Monday.

The agency hasn't seen average daily crossings at that level since April 2020, the official said. At the time, it was the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, when global travel and migration slowed dramatically.

Migrant crossings at the U.S.-Mexico border typically dip right after the winter holidays.

But the early January average was a quarter of what it was during the same week a year ago when average daily encounters topped 4,000, the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorized to speak with the press.

Even nine months ago, Border Patrol was reporting 1,000 migrant encounters a day in a single sector. "Encounters" refer to both migrants apprehended while trying to evade authorities and those who turn themselves in to border agents, seeking asylum.

In the El Paso Sector, which stretches from West Texas through New Mexico, border agents were encountering a daily average of 1,004 migrants during a seven-day period in late April, according to the city of El Paso's migrant "situational awareness" dashboard.

"We anticipated that more people would come to the U.S. or seek asylum in the U.S. around Christmastime or around the New Year," which is a typical seasonal pattern before numbers trail off, said Kari Lenander, executive director of the Border Servant Corps, a New Mexico-based nonprofit that provides migrant aid. "In fact, numbers have decreased not only in the El Paso Sector but also border-wide."

Guatemalan migrants walk after arriving at La Aurora Air Force Base on a deportation flight from the U.S., in Guatemala City, Guatemala, on Nov. 8.
JOSUE DECAVELE/REUTERS

> **"We anticipated that more people would come to the U.S. or seek asylum in the U.S. around Christmastime or around the New Year."**
>
> **Kari Lenander**
> Executive director of the Border Servant Corps, a New Mexico-based group that offers migrant aid

Two Border Patrol sectors are seeing the majority of the crossings in the first days of the year, the San Diego Sector in California and the Rio Grande Valley in South Texas, according to the Customs and Border Protection official.

The Border Patrol encounters don't include the migrants processed each day by U.S. customs officers at ports of entry. The Customs and Border Protection takes up to 1,450 appointments daily via the Biden administration's CBP One app, which migrants can use to make an appointment to seek asylum.

Migration swings from record highs to record lows

The number of migrants crossing the U.S.-Mexico border has swung dramatically during the administration of President Joe Biden, surging to record highs in 2022 and 2023 before dropping in the administration's final year to levels not seen since the first Trump administration.

U.S. Border Patrol reported more than 2 million migrant encounters per year each in fiscal 2022 and 2023, numbers that fueled criticism by Republicans about the administration's record on border security. Encounters dropped to 1.5 million in fiscal 2024, which ended in September.

Migrant encounters hit a historic one-month record above 249,000 in December 2023 – prompting the Biden administration to shut down key ports of entry with Mexico in a move to get Mexico to do more to enforce its own borders.

In December 2024, the U.S. Border Patrol reported 47,300 encounters, a more than 80% decline year over year.

"This sustained success is the result of strong border enforcement, extensive engagement with our foreign partners and the delivery of safe and lawful pathways that continue to provide humanitarian relief under our laws," Department of Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas told USA TODAY in an emailed statement.

Biden worked with Mexico to increase its enforcement of migrant routes north. Then, in June, the administration sharply restricted access to asylum between ports of entry, while continuing to process asylum-seekers via CBP One appointments at the ports. The number of encounters between ports of entry fell by a third after the asylum restrictions and has held near that level for six months.

At the same time, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement ramped up deportations in fiscal 2024 to the highest level since the Obama administration.

The administration also began providing aid to Panama to increase its repatriation flights and crack down on illegal crossings through the Darien Gap, a jungle route many migrants take from South America, headed for the U.S. border.

"None of these things is long-term," said Adam Isacson, director of defense oversight at the Washington Office on Latin America.

"Now, the new phenomenon is the arrival of Donald Trump. I think people are going to wait for the next few months to see what happens," before deciding whether they attempt to cross the border, he said.

President-elect Donald Trump, who takes office on Jan. 20, has promised to "seal the border" and launch a mass deportation as part of his signature campaign promise to reduce unlawful immigration.

Storm leaves frigid temperatures, mass power outages

Christopher Cann, Jeanine Santucci and Doyle Rice
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON – A deadly winter storm that blanketed the Midwest and Mid-Atlantic regions in snow largely subsided by Tuesday morning, leaving bitterly cold temperatures in its wake as tens of thousands remained without power and closures persisted.

The storm hammered a swath of the country from Kansas and Missouri to Virginia and New Jersey with heavy snow and ice, triggering emergency declarations as disruptions piled up on roads and at airports. The storm broke daily snowfall records in states across the central and eastern U.S.

The heavy snow shuttered federal office buildings in Washington, and they stayed closed Tuesday as snow still covered the city. The weather also delayed by 90 minutes a service for former President Jimmy Carter in the Capitol rotunda where members of Congress were to pay their respects before Carter lies in state through Wednesday.

Snow and ice made driving conditions treacherous and led to widespread delays and cancellations at airports.

More than 130 flights at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport outside Washington had been canceled by early Tuesday, according to FlightAware. A ground stop was ordered for flights Tuesday morning "due to snow or ice," according to the Federal Aviation Administration.

At Baltimore/Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport, at least 110 flights had been canceled, FlightAware said. Flights at LaGuardia Airport in New York City were delayed an average of 40 minutes because of wind, the FAA said.

Major highways, including Interstate 70, closed amid the hazards, though hundreds of motorists still became stranded in blizzard-like conditions.

Firefighters with Louisville Fire Department Quint 9 shovel snow in front of their station in Louisville, Ky., on Sunday.
LUKE SHARRETT/GETTY IMAGES

In Kansas, law enforcement officials reported two people died in a weather-related crash in Sedgwick County, which includes the city of Wichita. Meanwhile, in Mound City, Missouri, a man was struck and killed by a sliding truck, according to the Missouri State Highway Patrol. Additionally, Pennsylvania State Police were investigating a fatal crash involving a Transportation Department plow truck Saturday in Greenfield Township.

More than 200,000 without power

More than 200,000 homes and businesses from Missouri to Virginia woke up in the dark Tuesday, down from 280,000 reported outages a day earlier. Many without power lived in areas experiencing wind chills below zero, including in Virginia and West Virginia, where cold weather advisories were active Tuesday morning.

The state with the most blackouts was Virginia with 62,000 reported outages, followed by Kentucky, 33,000; West Virginia, 33,000; Indiana, 32,000; Illinois, 23,000; and Missouri, 19,000, according to PowerOutage.us.

Residents in Richmond, Virginia, woke up under a boil-water advisory Tuesday, and many reported a full loss of service after a power outage caused by the storm disrupted operations at the city's water treatment plant Monday.

High winds in the mix

Bitter cold temperatures worsened by high winds settled across the Mid-Atlantic region early Tuesday, prompting weather officials to urge residents to seek warmth.

"Very cold temperatures combined with power outages may cause difficulties concerning heating," the weather service office in Blacksburg, Virginia, said. It warned of 40 mph wind gusts.

Widespread school closures were in place Tuesday as snow and ice remained a travel hazard throughout the central and eastern U.S.

School districts shuttered classrooms for a second day in Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Ohio, West Virginia, Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Washington, D.C.

Though hundreds of schools did not reopen Tuesday, many planned to hold classes online. Monday was scheduled to be many students' first day back after winter break.

Texas to be blasted with snow

With the snow from one storm moving on, attention turns to the next system forecast to spread a wintry mess from Texas to the East Coast this week.

The storm will begin to spread snow and ice from the Texas/Mexico border Wednesday night and eventually track across much of the southern and possibly eastern United States toward the end of the week. "In places that don't get snow or ice very often, such as Austin, Dallas, Little Rock and Nashville, it will be a big deal," AccuWeather meteorologist Tom Kines told USA TODAY.

Though uncertainty remained in its path up the East Coast, the storm is forecast to bring significant winter weather to the southern Plains this week, National Weather Service meteorologist Zack Taylor told USA TODAY.

Northern Texas is on watch

Cities such as Dallas could get one of their most significant snowfalls in several years, according to AccuWeather.

"There will be enough energy in this storm for snow and ice in parts of Texas. We are forecasting several inches of snowfall in Dallas and along parts of I-20 in northern Texas," AccuWeather meteorologist Bernie Rayno said in a news release. "This storm could essentially shut down travel across northern Texas by Thursday night into Friday."

The national college football semifinal is scheduled for Dallas' Cotton Bowl on Friday night. Though the game will be played in a dome, travel to and from the site could be affected.

Taylor said that after walloping Texas, the storm will move into the Southeast, but then its path becomes uncertain over whether it will slide off the coast or track up toward the Northeast.

Contributing: John Bacon and Minnah Arshad

CORRECTION

A Dec. 27 story on Page 1A about the bald eagle's comeback gave incorrect information on the Declaration of Independence. The document was adopted on July 4, 1776, and signed Aug. 2 that year.

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Biden

Continued from Page 1A

clearly isn't looking forward to leaving his final elective office.

"It is a pretty historic time, isn't it?" he said as he greeted a reporter with a grin, hours before a monster snowstorm was set to pound the capital. "I mean, who would've – as my brother kids – who would've thunk it?"

'Who the hell knows?'

Concerns about the age and acuity of America's oldest president flared with his faltering performance in a televised debate with Trump in June. Democratic leaders who feared Trump would trounce Biden, among them former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, urged him to withdraw from the race, an unprecedented step so late in the campaign.

After he reluctantly pulled out in July, Vice President Kamala Harris became the Democratic nominee, then lost in November.

Could he have won?

"It's presumptuous to say that, but I think yes," Biden said, adding he based that view on polling he had reviewed. He expressed no such confidence when asked whether he had the vigor to serve another four years in office, though. "I don't know," he replied.

Many analysts doubt Biden could have won another term from voters who were gloomy about inflation and eager for change. What's more, his shuffling gait and verbal miscues had raised questions about his fitness for office.

Through an interview that stretched for nearly an hour, Biden was engaged and loquacious, though at times he spoke so softly that it was difficult to hear him. On his desk were index cards that seemed to have talking points and statistics, but he glanced at them only once, at the end, as if to make sure he had mentioned the items most important to him.

He became most animated, his voice rising, when he described the efforts of his son Hunter to stay sober – speaking of him not as someone whose troubles had embarrassed the president but as a fighter who had made his father proud.

He acknowledged his age was an issue.

"I had no intention of running after Beau died – for real, not a joke," Biden said, referring to the death of his elder son in 2015 of brain cancer. That family tragedy at what seemed to be the end of his political career was a bookend to the one at its beginning, when his first wife and baby daughter, Naomi, were killed in a car crash.

Then, in 2020, "when Trump was running again for reelection, I really thought I had the best chance of beating him. But I also wasn't looking to be president when I was 85 years old, 86 years old. And so I did talk about passing the baton" to the next generation of Democratic leaders, a phrase many in his party took to mean he wasn't likely to seek a second term.

"But I don't know," he said, returning to the question about whether he could have fulfilled the world's hardest job for another four years. "Who the hell knows? So far, so good. But who knows what I'm going to be when I'm 86 years old?"

Fundamental changes in the world

His experience has been an asset in handling foreign affairs, Biden said.

"I think the only advantage of being an old guy is that I've known every major world leader for a long time. And so I had a perspective on each of them and their interests," he said. He had chaired the Senate Foreign Relations Committee even before serving two terms as vice president. "And so I think it helped me navigate some of the fundamental changes taking place, whether it's in Europe, in Latin America, in the Middle East, in the Far East."

Biden said he reestablished alliances that Trump had frayed during his first term and managed an "inflection point" in history. As he leaves office, no American troops are deployed in wars abroad, though the United States is deeply involved in the war in Ukraine and the Israel-Hamas conflict in the Gaza Strip.

"The world's really getting small, man. Really getting smaller and smaller," he said, with the United States as its crucial leader. That view is at odds with Trump's call for "America First," with a national government less concerned about its global role. "What affects what happens in Japan is profoundly affected what happens in Ukraine. What happens in Zambia is going to affect what the hell happens in the Gulf."

Interviews like this one have been rare in Biden's tenure. He has held fewer news conferences and individual sessions with reporters than any president since at least Ronald Reagan. USA TODAY is the only print organization scheduled to sit down with him as he leaves office.

President Joe Biden told USA TODAY's Susan Page he could have beaten Trump, but he's not sure he could have served another four years. JOSH MORGAN/USA TODAY

That the White House agreed to this interview is a sign that, while Biden is still in a position to command the world's attention, he wants to make the case that he has forged a robust and positive legacy. The underlying message: The impact of his presidency cannot be fairly judged primarily by controversies over his health, his on-again-off-again presidential bid and his decision to grant a sweeping pardon for his son.

"I hope that history says that I came in and I had a plan how to restore the economy and reestablish America's leadership in the world," Biden said. "That was my hope. I mean, you know, who knows? And I hope it records that I did it with honesty and integrity, that I said what was on my mind."

Signs that his time was short were all around. The press room was almost empty, a member of the small pool of journalists asleep in a chair in the briefing room. White House staffers were giving quiet tours of the West Wing to family and friends while they still could, peeking into the Roosevelt Room and the Cabinet Room.

Later in the afternoon, Biden would go to the East Room to sign the Social Security Fairness Act, expanding benefits for millions of retirees and one of his last pieces of legislation.

Trump's surprising compliment

On the economy, Biden defended the $1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan and other legislative programs enacted in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic as crucial to boosting growth and jobs, though the massive spending has been criticized for also fueling inflation. "We spent money doing it. But the fact is that we had a soft landing, no recession," he said. Most economists had predicted a recession was inevitable.

"How in the hell in a changed world can America lead the world without having the finest infrastructure in the world, without having the best education system in the world, without being in a position where it has the best health care system in the world? I mean, they're just things that I thought were necessary."

The higher costs of groceries and rent continue to create kitchen-table problems for millions of Americans, although the rate of inflation has tempered. As Biden prepares to depart, the unemployment rate is near its historic lows, stock markets have surged and the economy is growing.

In public, Trump has decried the state of the nation as "a disaster" and "a mess." But at their private meeting, Trump praised him, Biden said. "He was very complimentary about some of the economic things I had done. And he talked about – he thought I was leaving with a good record."

The two men will be forever intertwined in history, Trump's two terms sandwiching Biden's one. They have offered Americans starkly different perspectives on the most fundamental issues, including the role of democratic institutions and the importance of political norms.

Eventually, one of them may be seen as a signal of the country's future course, the other as a political aberration.

Biden warned that Trump risked upending the economy if he enacts some of the policies he advocates.

"I think if he moves on the tax cuts of $5 trillion, I think if he moves on dealing with increasing tariffs across the board, all they are is increasing costs of consumers in America. And if he decides to do away with some of the major programs, whether it's dealing with the rescue plan or infrastructure or the climate law, I think he's just going to, you know, hurt himself, hurt the economy."

Biden's predecessor-turned-successor has vowed to undo much of his legacy. Biden has tried to make that as difficult as possible, including by spending billions of dollars from the $1.2 trillion infrastructure bill in red states and districts – projects now lauded by some of the Republican members of Congress who represent them.

"It's the way to lock in a changed economic policy," Biden said. He hopes.

Biden's biggest disappointments

Regrets? He has a few.

His biggest disappointment, Biden said, was his failure to effectively counter misinformation, including that from Trump. He said that challenge reflects the revolution in how Americans get their news, and whom they trust to tell it.

"Because of the way, nature, the nature of the way information is shared now, there are no editors out there to say 'That's simply not true,'" Biden said. He mentioned Trump's rhetoric about the threat from migrants, though in doing so he apparently conflated two recent attacks by Army veterans involving trucks, one in New Orleans and the other in Las Vegas.

"The guy in Las Vegas is a guy, is a veteran, born and raised in America," Biden said. "And yet the president comes along, soon to be president again, come along and says: 'It's clear. It's an invasion from the south. All these immigrants are causing all this problem.' ... And I'll bet you there's 70% of people out there that read that and believe it. How do you deal with that?"

In Las Vegas, the man behind the explosion of a Tesla Cybertruck outside the Trump hotel was reportedly a Trump supporter, leaving writings calling it a "wake up call" and saying the United States was "terminally ill and headed toward collapse."

In New Orleans, the man who drove a truck into a crowd in the French Quarter was a Texas-born American who had been radicalized by the Islamic State group, or ISIS.

"When I said that the criminals coming in are far worse than the criminals we have in our country, that statement was constantly refuted by Democrats and the Fake News Media, but it turned out to be true," Trump had posted on Truth Social after the New Orleans attack.

Biden also expressed frustration about how long it took to get shovels in the ground for the infrastructure projects. "Historians will talk about (how) great the impact was, but it didn't (have) any immediate impact on people's lives," he said. "I think we would've been a hell of a lot better off had we been able to go much harder at getting some of these projects in the ground quicker.

"And so I don't think I've been very good at –" He paused.

Taking credit?

"Or not so much me, but establish that the government did this for you."

Susan Page is the Washington Bureau chief of USA TODAY. She has covered 12 presidential campaigns and seven White House administrations, and she has interviewed the past 10 presidents (three of them after they left office).

Joe Biden: When my friend Jimmy Carter asked me to deliver eulogy

Susan Page
USA TODAY

The first time Joe Biden saw Jimmy Carter, both were young men with big ambitions, underdogs strategizing with each other on how to make their way up in politics.

The last time they saw each other, Biden was the sitting president and Carter a former one, then 96 years old and making plans for his funeral.

"I bent down – he was in tough shape – to kiss him goodbye, and he asked me to do his eulogy," President Biden said in an interview Sunday with USA TODAY. That's a promise Biden is set to fulfill Thursday at Carter's state funeral at Washington National Cathedral, an occasion expected to draw all five living presidents and former presidents.

Their final conversation was in 2021, on Biden's 100th day in office, a milestone that can carry political meaning. Biden and first lady Jill Biden had flown to Plains, Georgia, to see Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter, the first time any of Carter's successors had visited him in his hometown. It was a chance for the two men to say goodbye.

Their connection went back decades, to 1974, when Biden was in his first term as a senator from Delaware and Carter was in the final year of his only term as governor of Georgia. Biden, then 31, was in Atlanta to speak to a convention of the Jaycees, a leadership training organization then limited to men under 40.

In a meeting at the governor's mansion before Biden's speech, they hit it off. When Carter announced his long-shot bid for the presidency that December, Biden was the first politician outside Georgia to endorse him.

Their relationship would have its ups and downs. Biden even considered challenging Carter for the Democratic nomination in 1980. They were politicians of different stripes – Biden the legislative insider, a believer in the power of personal relationships, and Carter forever the outsider, seemingly suspicious of them.

But they remained friends, and they would share history. Both would turn out to be one-term presidents, their bids for reelection damaged by inflation and the accusation by critics that they weren't up to the job.

"Carter was a decent man," Biden said. "I think Carter looked at the world not from here" – he held his hand up high – "but from here," moving his hand to the level of his heart, "where everybody else lives."

Carter reminded Biden of his father. "My dad used to talk about, 'Everybody's entitled to be treated with dignity no matter what, just an even chance.' And that was Carter."

A White House photo from their final visit shows the Bidens kneeling next to the Carters' easy chairs. Everyone is beaming.

Military horse unit carries Jimmy Carter to Capitol

Ceremony for former president is group's 1st mission since 2023 halt

Tom Vanden Brook USA TODAY

The U.S. Army's Caisson Detachment carries the casket of former President Jimmy Carter to lie in state at the U.S. Capitol in Washington on Tuesday. MARKO DJURICA/REUTERS

WASHINGTON – For the soldiers and horses carrying former President Jimmy Carter's casket to the Capitol, Tuesday was as high-profile and no-fail a mission as they get.

They carried the flag-draped casket in a dramatic procession to the U.S. Capitol, where the 39th president will lie in state until Thursday morning. As it departed the U.S. Navy Memorial, the caisson passed by crowds of onlookers braving the bitter cold to pay their respects. It was followed by members of the Carter family on foot.

The funeral procession was "designed to mirror Carter's inaugural parade where Carter and his family walked on foot from the U.S. Capitol to the White House on Jan. 20, 1977," according to the Joint Task Force-National Capital Region and The U.S. Army Military District of Washington.

During Sunday's rehearsal to make sure everything went perfectly, the five soldiers and eight horses of the Army's Caisson Detachment halted, the U.S. Capitol about a mile away. Surprised spectators snapped photos as wind scythed down Independence Avenue in northwest Washington under a milky sun.

The soldiers muttered encouragement; their horses nickered. An honor guard loaded an empty coffin into the caisson, a ceremonial wagon designed a century ago to ferry artillery to the battlefront and the wounded and dead to the rear. The practice procession resumed, a rider in front took the lead. A riderless horse, with the traditional boots in the stirrups facing backward, brought up the rear.

"We are executing our flagship mission," said Lt. Col. Branden Quintana, commander of the Caisson Detachment, part of the Army's 3rd Infantry Regiment known as The Old Guard. "There's no better way for us to pay our respect and honor the former president. It's something we feel in the center of our heart, the pit of our stomach. This is the pinnacle."

Almost two years ago, that summit seemed inaccessible. The Army suspended the horse unit's operation in May 2023 following the deaths of two horses used to haul caissons in funerals at Arlington National Cemetery. Veterinarians and horse experts called for a total renovation of the program, "down to the studs," Quintana said.

USA TODAY had exclusive access to the stable, soldiers and horses as they practiced for Tuesday's procession. The soldiers, horse experts and veterinarians talked about their moment in the spotlight and the reforms needed to get there. It's their first mission since the suspension.

"We have the opportunity to do it on a national stage," Quintana said.

The caisson detachment at Fort Myer, adjacent to Arlington National Cemetery, assumed duty to escort funerals in 1948. It followed the tradition of using a caisson and three two-horse teams with three riders.

They performed stately, somber ceremonies for years at the cemetery: Handsome, dark and gray horses pulled a gleaming caisson, spit-and-polish soldiers with signature high-and-tight haircuts directing the operation.

> **"There's no better way for us to pay our respect and honor the former president. It's something we feel in the center of our heart, the pit of our stomach. This is the pinnacle."**
>
> **Lt. Col. Branden Quintana**
> Commander of the Caisson Detachment

Behind that scene, though, the unit had suffered from too much work, antiquated equipment and inadequate care for the horses. In 2022, the Army euthanized two horses, Mickey and Tony, after it was found that they had eaten sand or gravel that fouled their guts.

The Army suspended the caisson operation in 2023. The remaining horses retired to Florida.

'We're trying to protect the horses'

The Army hired highly qualified experts for advice that ranged from finding the right horses for caisson duty to designing the curriculum for soldiers who care for and ride them. Jim Westbrook, an expert on horse carriage and wagons, helps identify and buy new horses for the unit.

The horses are stabled at the NOVA Equestrian Center in the Virginia suburbs, a 40-acre facility with space and equipment necessary to keep them fit. Their turn-of-the century stables at Fort Myer are also being renovated.

Each horse has a custom-fit saddle, scrapping the historic model used for 75 years. The Army also modified the wagon they haul, dropping as much as 1,400 pounds from the load.

Olympic equestrian gold medalist David O'Connor supervised the creation of a 12-week course to teach soldiers basic horsemanship. Paired with their horses, the soldiers then head to Ocala, Florida, for six weeks of intensive training for the caisson mission.

The standard of caring for horses has risen over time, and the Army had fallen behind, O'Connor said. It takes expertise, time and money to catch up. It also requires athletic soldiers to ride, steer and understand them. Horses are social animals who relate to each other and their human handlers.

"We're trying to protect the horses and do the right thing," he said.

'Humbling' to escort a former president

On Sunday morning, before their practice run, the horses woke to a chilly morning at Fort Myer, where they stayed before the event. Steam puffed from the nostrils of Burns, a 10-year-old mustang from Nevada, as he stared out from his stall.

Some soldiers groomed their horses and applied shiny black polish to their hooves. Others swept wood shavings and manure. It felt calm, quiet, routine.

The soldiers and horses have been rehearsing for months, with bands playing and cannons firing to prepare them for the pomp and circumstance of a president's funeral, said Maj. Wes Strickland, a spokesman for the Old Guard.

Not every president requests horses for their funeral. John F. Kennedy did, and Black Jack, the riderless horse, vaulted the caisson unit into the public eye. George H.W. Bush did not. Ronald Reagan, a noted enthusiast did. That's the last time the caisson unit took part.

"We're under a microscope," said Lt. Col. Derrick Draper, deputy commander of the regiment. "People will be looking for the slightest flaw. And they should be. We hold ourselves to the highest standard."

On the route, the horses proceeded at the steady walking pace of a person. They stopped, they started, they turned in unison. They didn't flinch, O'Connor noted, when Pershing's Own, the Army's band, broke out "God Bless America."

Col. Clayton Chilcoat, an Army veterinarian, kept watch with first-aid kit in hand. He liked what he saw. A calm, quiet routine.

No surprise to Sgt. Shawn Tabor, who grew up around horses. He's been with the unit for seven years and has completed 550 caisson ceremonies.

"I love these horses," Tabor said. "It's very, very humbling to be part of burying a U.S. president. To be able to honor him and his family."

Contributing: John Bacon and Jeanine Santucci

Biden tells New Orleans 'you are not alone' during visit after attack

Joey Garrison USA TODAY

President Joe Biden mourned with family members of victims and said the nation stands with them during a stop Monday night in New Orleans five days after a man killed 14 people when he rammed a truck into pedestrians on bustling Bourbon Street early New Year's Day morning.

"I know events like this are hard. The shock and pain is still so very raw," Biden said at an interfaith prayer service at St. Louis Cathedral in New Orleans. "My wife Jill and I are here to stand with you, grieve with you, pray with you, let you know you are not alone. The rest of the nation is looking at you as well."

Biden, accompanied by first lady Jill Biden, sat on a front-row pew during the emotional service alongside Louisiana Gov. Jeff Landry and New Orleans Mayor LaToya Cantrell as leaders of different faiths delivered sermons and prayers for peace and healing. The president appeared to tear up at one point during the service.

Names of the 14 people killed in the attack were read aloud and a candle for each carried and placed on a table at the front of the sanctuary. The first couple, on behalf of the nation, then placed a candle at the center of the table.

"If there's one thing we know, New Orleans defines strength and resilience," Biden said. "You define it, whether it's in the form of this attack, or hurricanes or superstorms. This city and its people get back up. That's the spirit of America as well."

Ahead of the service, the Bidens met with families of victims, survivors of the attack, two injured police officers and other law enforcement personnel during a private gathering at the cathedral.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation has said 42-year-old Shamsud Din Jabbar, a U.S. military veteran from Houston, acted alone carrying out what the FBI has labeled a terrorist attack.

Jabbar posted five videos on social media expressing support for the Islamic State terrorist group ISIS over the roughly hour and a half before the 3:15 a.m. CST attack, according to the FBI. An ISIS flag was found in the back of the truck. Jabbar placed two ice coolers with explosives along Bourbon Street, but the devices were not detonated.

Biden, who lost his first wife and daughter in a car crash five decades ago and his son Beau to brain cancer in 2015, referenced his own personal tragedies.

"It's not the same, but we know what it's like to lose a piece of our soul," Biden said. "The anger, the emptiness, the black hole that seems to be sucking you into your chest, the sense of loss, the questions of faith in your soul."

Shortly arriving in New Orleans, the Bidens stopped by the site of the attack on Bourbon Street and laid flowers at a shrine for victims.

They stood in silence, heads bowed, as the president gave a sign of the cross with his hand.

In his remarks at the cathedral, Biden listed off descriptions of some of those killed in the attack: students who dreamed on becoming engineers and nurses, a star athlete who worked on Wall Street, another who helped coach small children, a warehouse manager, a fan of bluegrass music, and a cook engaged to get married.

Biden said the nation also stands with the 35 people injured in the attack and thanked first responders for their bravery.

He said he has directed his administration to federal, state and local law enforcement to complete the investigation and provide any assistance that is needed.

"I know from some experience, it's hard," Biden said. "But I promise you, the day will come when the memory of your loved one – when you pass that park, open that closet door, smell that fragrance, just remember that laugh – will bring a smile to your lips before a tear to your eye.

"It will take time. But I promise you, I promise you, it will come," he added.

"My prayer is that that day comes sooner rather than later."

President Joe Biden and first lady Jill Biden place a candle during a service with people affected by the Jan. 1 attack, at St. Louis Cathedral in New Orleans. ROBERTO SCHMIDT/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

LEGAL NOTICE

United States Bankruptcy Court for the District of Vermont

In re Roman Catholic Diocese of Burlington, Vermont, Case No. 24-10205-HZC

Claims Notice for Survivors of Sexual Abuse and Others With Claims Against the Roman Catholic Diocese of Burlington, Vermont

If you were sexually abused by any person connected with the Diocese, a Catholic parish, or Catholic school within the geographic area of the Diocese, or have any claim against the Diocese, you must file a claim by **April 4, 2025**.

For more diocesan information: visit **vermontcatholic.org**

For the bankruptcy docket: visit **https://case.stretto.com/dioceseofburlington**

For U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the District of Vermont information: visit **vtb.uscourts.gov**

For advice about your rights: **contact an attorney**

Norovirus is typically short-lived, passing through the system in one to three days. NITCHAREE SUKHONTAPIROM/GETTY IMAGES

US suffers surge of norovirus cases in winter's early days

Best way to battle ailment is to rest, stay hydrated

Adrianna Rodriguez
USA TODAY

As if cold and flu season weren't bad enough, this winter is turning out to be a particularly bad one for stomach bugs.

By Dec. 11, 495 outbreaks of norovirus had been reported nationwide, compared with 393 outbreaks the same time last year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Health experts expect more cases when the season reaches its peak in mid-January.

Norovirus, typically from contaminated food or water, is a leading cause of vomiting and diarrhea. The only thing bearable about it is that it is typically short-lived, passing through the system in one to three days.

If you're unlucky enough to encounter the virus, here's how to get through the next few days:

These are symptoms of norovirus infection, according to the Minnesota Department of Health and the Cleveland Clinic:

- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Stomach cramping
- Urinating less or dark-colored urine
- Dry mouth
- Feeling weak
- Dizziness

Less common symptoms are:

- Low-grade fever or chills
- Headache
- Muscle aches

A person who is sick and has been infected with the virus will typically experience the symptoms suddenly. Children with the virus may be fussy, sleepy throughout the day and cry without tears.

People begin to show symptoms one to two days after they've been exposed to the virus, according to the Minnesota Department of Health. But symptoms can appear 12 hours after exposure.

Though a person infected with the virus may experience unpleasant symptoms, others may be asymptomatic and show no symptoms at all. But they can still be contagious and pass the virus to others.

Children younger than 5, older adults and people with weakened immune systems are more likely to develop severe infections, according to the CDC.

How to treat norovirus

There are no antivirals to treat norovirus, and the CDC warns against taking antibiotics because the medication won't work and can lead to dangerous antibiotic resistance.

The best way to get through the stomach flu is to rest, stay hydrated and listen to your body, said Dr. Paul Sax, clinical director of the infectious disease division at Brigham and Women's Hospital. That might mean not eating solid foods for most of the day.

"Don't force yourself to eat if you're not ready to eat," said Sax, who is also a professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School. "If you're feeling a little better, then it's time to introduce foods."

There are no antivirals to treat norovirus, and the CDC warns against taking antibiotics because the medication won't work and can lead to dangerous antibiotic resistance.

What should you eat while sick with norovirus?

If you're not ready for solids, Sax recommends drinking diluted sodas or juices to compensate for the lack of calories throughout the day.

It's easy to get dehydrated with a stomach bug, so the CDC recommends drinking plenty of liquids.

When it's time to reintroduce solid foods, many doctors will recommend the BRAT diet: bananas, rice, applesauce and toast. But Sax said a patient at the end of a norovirus infection can eat whatever they want if they feel their body is ready.

He recommends avoiding alcohol because it tends to slow recovery. Some people also avoid dairy products because norovirus can lead to a temporary lactose intolerance. The infection damages the gut lining, which leads to a lack of lactase, the enzyme that breaks down lactose.

Even if patients feel better, Sax says, the virus can still be in their system.

How to avoid getting norovirus

Sax recommends continuing to practice good hygiene if you're sick to not spread it to other people.

Hand sanitizers are not effective against norovirus, so it's important to wash hands for at least 20 seconds with soap and water, the CDC says.

Unfortunately, people can still pass on norovirus for two weeks or more after being infected.

Norovirus spreads very easily between people, for instance by sharing food, eating or drinking liquids handled by someone with the virus, or touching contaminated surfaces and then putting unwashed fingers in your mouth, according to the CDC.

The most common cause of norovirus is contaminated food and water, Sax said. "There are certain foods that are more likely to have norovirus, and one of the more common villains in infectious disease are raw oysters," Sax said.

Contributing: Julia Gomez

Cases of HMPV are on the increase in China and US

Fernando Cervantes Jr.
USA TODAY

Pedestrians pass a mural promoting use of face masks in Bengaluru on Monday amid reports that two cases of HMPV have been detected in India's Karnataka state. IDREES MOHAMMED/AFP

Authorities in China said they are monitoring cases of human metapneumovirus, or HMPV, after a reported increase inside the country, according to Reuters.

Although cases are increasing at a rapid rate, health officials say that the outbreak is not out of the ordinary and that the risk of another COVID-19 pandemic remains low.

"The overall scale and intensity of respiratory infectious diseases in China this year are lower than last year," a spokesperson for the World Health Organization said, according to reporting from ABC News.

In the United States, HMPV cases have seen an increase since November, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. As of Dec. 28, 1.94% of weekly tests returned positive for HMPV.

CDC officials confirmed to USA TODAY that it is monitoring conditions in China closely.

"CDC is aware of reported increases of HMPV in China and is in regular contact with international partners and monitoring reports of increased disease. These reports are not currently a cause for concern in the U.S.," the CDC said in a statement.

What is HMPV?

According to the CDC, HMPV can cause upper and lower respiratory disease and can be spread from person to person or through surfaces.

Originally discovered in 2001, it forms part of the "pneumoviridae family along with respiratory syncytial virus (RSV)," the agency says.

What are the symptoms of HMPV?

Similarly to other seasonal colds, symptoms include cough, nasal congestion, fever and shortness of breath, the CDC said. But these symptoms can progress to bronchitis or pneumonia.

The incubation period of the virus can be three to six days, according to the CDC, and the groups at highest risk include younger children and adults 65 or older. Similarly to the flu, HMPV is seasonal; its circulation starts in winter and lasts through spring.

Is there a treatment for HMPV?

The CDC says there is no treatment of vaccines to tackle HMPV, but it did say medical care can be "supportive." The Cleveland Clinic says treatments for the virus can include oxygen therapy if the patient has a hard time breathing.

Can you prevent HMPV?

Yes, HMPV can be prevented by taking some of the steps outlined by the CDC.

- Wash hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Avoid touching eyes, nose or mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.

For people who have cold-like symptoms, the CDC also recommended:

- Covering mouth and nose when coughing and sneezing.
- Washing hands frequently and correctly (with soap and water for at least 20 seconds).
- Avoid sharing their cups and eating utensils with others.
- Refrain from kissing.
- Stay at home when sick.

LEGAL NOTICE

Call for heirs of Hartmann Barbara Perry to come forward

Hartmann Barbara Perry, born on January 26, 1949 in Connecticut, USA, US citizen, previously residing in Switzerland, 8758 Obstalden, Nidstalden 10, passed away on July 29, 2024 in Glarus GL, Switzerland, leaving a last will and testament covering her entire estate.

As the office responsible for opening the will is not aware of the legal heirs, the latter are invited, pursuant to Art. 555 of the Swiss Civil Code, to make themselves known to the Inheritance Office (Fachstelle Erbschaft, Asylstrasse 30, 8750 Glarus, Switzerland) by January 8th, 2026 and to produce documentary evidence of their entitlement to inherit.

If nobody comes forward by the above time limit, the appointed heirs who are known to the Inheritance Office will be given possession of the inheritance, subject to any inheritance recovery action.

Inheritance Office
Fachstelle Erbschaft Glarus, Switzerland

Stars

Continued from Page 1A

the first time, that studying large numbers of individual stars in a distant galaxy is possible," Sun, of the Center for Astrophysics, a research institute jointly operated by the Harvard College Observatory and Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory, said in a statement.

Gravitational lensing unveils historic number of distant stars

Most galaxies, including our Milky Way, contain tens of billions of stars that are readily observable. Even in nearby galaxies, such as Andromeda, which is about 2.5 million light-years away, astronomers can observe stars one by one.

But when astronomers look at distant galaxies billions of light-years away, individual stars can appear fuzzy – blended as their light travels great distances to reach us on Earth. For that reason, astronomers have long struggled to study how distant galaxies form and evolve.

"To us, galaxies that are very far away usually look like a diffuse, fuzzy blob," study lead author Yoshinobu Fudamoto, an astronomer at Chiba University in Japan, said in a statement. "But actually, those blobs consist of many, many individual stars."

Thanks to recent scientific advances, astronomers are only now getting better at observing those individual distant stars. Using a technique called gravitational lensing, the team of researchers was able to make their historic stellar discovery in a distant galaxy located nearly 6.5 billion light-years from Earth.

As first predicted by Albert Einstein, gravitational lensing occurs when a massive celestial body causes a sufficient curvature of spacetime for the path of light around it to be visibly bent, as if by a lens. The effect can amplify the light of distant stars, making it possible for instruments like the Webb telescope to detect them.

Discovery found from Webb images of 'Dragon Arc' galaxy

The team of astronomers did not expect to find the trove of stars while studying Webb images of a galaxy known as the Dragon Arc.

Fortuitously, the light from the stars was magnified by a massive cluster of galaxies in front of it called Abell 370. The effect of gravitational lensing then stretched the Dragon Arc's signature spiral into an elongated shape, "like a hall of mirrors of cosmic proportions," according to the news release accompanying the research paper.

"When we processed the data, we realized that there were what appeared to be a lot of individual star points," Sun said. "It was an exciting find because it was the first time we were able to see so many individual stars so far away."

Abell 370, a galaxy cluster nearly 4 billion light-years away, has several arcs of light, including the "Dragon Arc," lower left of center. PROVIDED BY NASA

By studying the colors of each of the stars inside the Dragon Arc, the team concluded that many are red supergiants, similar to Betelgeuse in the constellation of Orion. While the Hubble Space Telescope was able to previously observe seven of the 44 stars detected, the Webb telescope's ability to detect infrared wavelengths allowed astronomers to "resolve stars that were previously outside of our capability," Sun said.

The team believes the discovery of so many stars will help scientists better understand dark matter.

Will the landmark discovery prompt future observations?

The researchers hope their landmark discovery will prompt follow-up observations of magnified stars in both the Dragon Arc galaxy and other distant galaxies.

"These findings have typically been limited to just one or two stars per galaxy," Fudamoto said. "To study stellar populations in a statistically meaningful way, we need many more observations of individual stars."

Former President Trump talk with his attorney Todd Blanche after a jury found him guilty of all 34 felony counts in his criminal trial at New York State Supreme Court in New York, New York, on May 30. MARK PETERSON/VIA REUTERS

Trump's appeal to postpone sentencing denied in NY case

Move in hush money case is set for Friday

Bart Jansen
USA TODAY

A New York appeals court rejected President-elect Donald Trump's request to halt the sentencing in his hush-money case scheduled for Friday after a Tuesday hearing.

Associate Judge Ellen Gesmer, a judge in the state's appellate division, wrote that after considering Trump's paperwork and "extensive oral argument," she denied his request for a temporary delay in sentencing.

Trump was convicted of falsifying business records to hide payments to a porn actress. Trump's lawyers contend the case should be dismissed because of presidential immunity or at least that the sentencing be postponed until after appeals have been resolved.

"Do you have any support for the notion that presidential immunity extends to a president-elect?" Gesmer asked.

"There has never been a case like this before, so no," responded Trump's lawyer, Todd Blanche.

Blanche had argued that immunity shielding sitting presidents from criminal charges for official acts while in office extends to the transition period between an election and inauguration.

But because Trump is the first former president ever charged criminally or convicted, immunity remains largely untested in court.

The appeals hearing came a day after Judge Juan Merchan rejected a request to delay the sentencing while the case is appealed.

Merchan rejected Trump's request Friday to dismiss the case as well. Trump argued he was shielded from charges as a former president.

Merchan said the best way to bring finality to the case was to sentence Trump without prison time, fine or probation while his appeals continued.

Merchan wrote that Trump's request for a delay was mostly "a repetition of the arguments he has raised numerous times in the past."

Trump contends the Supreme Court's July decision that shielded former presidents from criminal charges for official acts in office made Trump immune from the New York case.

Merchan ruled that the case dealt with his personal conduct.

Trump was convicted in May of 34 counts of falsifying business records. Trump paid his former lawyer, Michael Cohen, who in turn paid a adult film actress, Stormy Daniels, to remain silent before the 2016 election about an alleged sexual encounter.

The court battle is playing out during the two weeks before Trump's inauguration to return to the White House on Jan. 20.

The appeal went to what is called the appellate division of the first judicial department in New York state court.

Blanche, who was designated to become the deputy attorney general in his administration, argued that the immunity should extend to the transition before returning to office.

"Merchan is without authority under the law to proceed to sentencing while President Trump exercises his federal constitutional right to challenge these rulings, and the erroneous jury verdict in the underlying criminal case must be vacated and the charges against President Trump must be dismissed with prejudice, without further delay," Blanche wrote.

Judge blocks release of special counsel report

Trump hails decision, criticizes Jack Smith

Bart Jansen
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON – A federal judge ordered Justice Department special counsel Jack Smith not to publicly release his report on the investigation of President-elect Donald Trump until after she has a chance to consider arguments about the report on charges that have been dismissed.

U.S. District Judge Aileen Cannon ordered Attorney General Merrick Garland and Smith not to release or share the report or any drafts outside the Justice Department unless an appeals court rules differently.

Trump welcomed the decision about what he called a "fake report" by noting that Cannon had dismissed the charges by ruling that Smith was appointed and funded illegitimately. He called the investigation a "witch hunt" and Smith "deranged" and a "disgrace."

"If they're not allowed to issue the report, that's the way it should be," Trump said. "That's great news."

Trump appointed Cannon in 2020.

Smith's report is expected to provide the fullest description yet about the investigation that led to two federal indictments against Trump, one for allegedly conspiring to overturn the 2020 election and the other for allegedly mishandling classified documents after leaving the White House.

A public release of the potential bombshell report could come within days. But a court battle over whether to release the report will play out over the remaining two weeks before Trump returns to the White House on Jan. 20.

Judges dismissed both cases at Smith's request under longstanding Justice Department policy against prosecuting sitting presidents. Neither case could be concluded before Trump starts his second term as president.

But special counsels typically write reports explaining their investigations and the decisions about whether to bring charges. Special counsel Robert Mueller's report released in April 2019 about the investigation into Russian interference caused another firestorm because of his decision not to consider charges against Trump as a sitting president.

Smith acknowledged in a court filing Monday that he has prepared a two-volume report, one for each of Trump's two federal indictments. The report is being "finalized" and Garland would not release the report before Friday at 10 a.m., Smith wrote. Smith said he could transmit the report to Garland after 1 p.m. Tuesday.

But Trump asked Garland on Monday to halt Smith's preparation and release of the report.

Trump's co-defendants in the classified-documents case, Walt Nauta and Carlos De Oliveira, asked the same of Cannon. Smith had said he would reply formally to the request by 7 p.m. Tuesday, but Cannon ruled before he filed.

Nauta and De Oliveira, who were staffers at Trump's home at Mar-a-Lago, where they were charged with conspiring to hide classified records, argued they could still face charges after Trump's dismissal of the case. Smith's report "promises to be a one-sided, slanted report" that has "a single purpose: convincing the public that everyone Smith charged is guilty of the crimes charged," Nauta and De Oliveira argued.

Trump also asked to participate in the Florida arguments.

"As a former and soon-to-be President, uniquely familiar with the pernicious consequences of lawfare perpetrated by Smith, his Office, and others at DOJ, President Trump should be permitted to participate in these proceedings," Trump's lawyers wrote.

In a letter to Garland, Trump's lawyers argued that the dismissal of the cases represented "Trump's complete exoneration," but that Smith's report would "perpetuate false and discredited accusations." The lawyers argued that the release of the report would be "both imprudent and unlawful."

Garland declined to comment.

Former Rep. Liz Cheney, R-Wyo., who helped lead the congressional investigation of the Capitol attack on Jan. 6, 2021, said Garland has a duty to release the report and "prevent its evidence from being destroyed." Smith's team obtained testimony and evidence from Trump's advisers including former Vice President Mike Pence, she said.

"The truth must prevail," Cheney wrote on X.

Trump was indicted in federal court in Washington on charges he conspired to overturn the 2020 election with baseless claims of widespread fraud. He was also charged with obstructing Congress from counting Electoral College votes on Jan. 6, 2021, when a riot of his supporters at the Capitol temporarily halted the count.

U.S. District Judge Tanya Chutkan dismissed the case at Smith's request after Trump won the November election.

Trump was also indicted in Florida on charges he unlawfully retained national defense documents after leaving the White House at the end of his first administration. FBI agents found more than 100 classified documents during a search of Mar-a-Lago in August 2022.

After Cannon dismissed the charges, Smith appealed to the 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals but the court dismissed the appeal at his request after Trump's election.

Nauta and De Oliveira asked the appeals court to return jurisdiction over the case to Cannon so she can hear their arguments. Cannon said her ruling would stand unless the appeals court rules differently.

OPINION

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We're on Facebook (USA TODAY Opinion) and Instagram and X, formerly Twitter (@usatodayopinion). You can also comment directly on columns.

We must confront ISIS recruitment in US

Nicole Russell
USA TODAY

Loved ones mourn at a memorial to the 14 people killed in New Orleans when a driver intentionally drove into a crowd on Bourbon Street early New Year's Day. MICHAEL DEMOCKER/GETTY IMAGES

The horrific attack a week ago in New Orleans that killed at least 14 people and injured more than 30 is an agonizing reminder that the Islamic State terrorist organization continues to recruit and inspire enemies, foreign and domestic.

This attack should inspire vigilance and unity in America. And we must take the threat of future terrorist attacks seriously in a world increasingly divided by armed violence.

The FBI identified the suspect in the New Orleans attack as Shamsud-Din Jabbar, a 42-year-old Army veteran and Texas native.

Police say he drove a 3-ton truck at a high rate of speed into a festive crowd on Bourbon Street in the early hours of New Year's Day. Jabbar was dressed in military gear and reportedly carried an ISIS flag in the rental truck.

Police shot and killed him as he opened fire on officers after the crash.

New Orleans and Las Vegas attacks both involved veterans

The FBI reportedly found recorded evidence indicating that Jabbar had planned to kill his family but joined ISIS instead.

This time, the weapon was a speeding truck. Next time, it could be even worse.

On the same day as the New Orleans attack, a Tesla Cybertruck – loaded with gas tanks, camping fuel and fireworks – exploded outside the Trump International Hotel in Las Vegas.

Police said the driver, who was killed in the blast, used a device to set off the explosion, which injured seven people. He was identified as Matthew Livelsberger, an active-duty member of the Army's elite Special Forces.

Federal authorities are investigating whether the incidents in Las Vegas and New Orleans are related.

What radicalized Jabbar, who served in the Army for more than a decade? And how deep were his connections to ISIS terrorists?

Those aren't merely idle questions.

For months, U.S. officials have warned that a branch of ISIS based in Afghanistan has significantly increased its recruitment efforts in the United States and other countries.

In October, an immigrant from Afghanistan living in Oklahoma was charged with planning to launch a terrorist attack on Election Day.

Authorities in Europe in recent months said they stopped similar terrorist attacks planned against targets in France and Sweden.

Americans need to know the extent of the threats inside the United States, and we need to know what our government is doing to protect us.

The current political environment in which this terrorist act, or acts, took place must not be overlooked.

Political infighting is a petty privilege that takes Americans' safety and the nation's stability for granted. Our political leaders act as if each day is guaranteed to them and their constituents. It's not.

Only weeks from Inauguration Day, Republicans in Congress fought over re-electing House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La. The Senate will be led by a new majority leader, John Thune, R-S.D.

Terrorists look for weak spots that they can exploit, and the fact that the presidential transition is unfolding and new leadership is on the way in Congress would appear to create an opportunity to sow fear and confusion.

White House, Congress must focus on national security

Political infighting is a petty privilege that takes Americans' safety and the nation's stability for granted. Our political leaders act as if each day is guaranteed to them and their constituents. It's not.

This act of terrorism should bring us back to the political center, with the White House and Congress focused on national security.

Terrorism has a way of clarifying things. The act of terror perpetrated in New Orleans – and perhaps in Las Vegas – is a sobering reminder that fear and chaos can strike in the heart of America even as we gather to celebrate the hope and joy of a new year.

Nicole Russell is an opinion columnist with USA TODAY. She lives in Texas with her four kids.

Trump has a history of lying about domestic terrorism

Chris Brennan
USA TODAY

It was a gruesome and ghastly act perpetrated to terrorize Americans gathered in a festive mood to enjoy together the city around them. Then, federal prosecutors say, a 42-year-old man, driven by a twisted and aberrant notion of religion, climbed behind the wheel of a rented pickup and plowed through a crowd of people.

That describes what happened in the early morning hours of the first day of 2025 when 14 people were killed and dozens more injured in a terrorist act in the French Quarter of New Orleans last Wednesday, investigators said.

Nine months into the first Trump presidency

It also described a sickeningly similar act in New York on Halloween in 2017, nine months into Donald Trump's first term as president.

A killer, also acting in the name of the Islamic State terrorism, killed eight and wounded more on a bike path in Lower Manhattan.

Trump, an opportunist with no allegiance to truth, used that 2017 attack on his watch to launch baseless attacks on his political opponents, to cast them as weak on immigration, to leverage terrorism for political gain.

He did the same thing this week, even after it was firmly established that the suspect killed during the New Orleans attack, Shamsud-Din Jabbar, was an American citizen born and raised in Texas who served for more than a decade in the U.S. Army.

The very first day of 2025 shows us what we're giving up – again – in the presidency, where serious, somber and sober stewardship is on the way out, being replaced – again – by a feckless fealty to false rhetoric in a constant appeal for division.

Compare President Joe Biden's reaction to the New Orleans attack with Trump's disinformation and distortion.

Biden waited for detailed briefings to know what he could share about the act of terrorism. Trump, as president-elect until Jan. 20, also receives intelligence briefings.

He chose to use his social media platform, the incredibly inaccurately named Truth Social, last Wednesday morning to blame "criminals" entering the country illegally for the day's mayhem. He threw in some blame for Democrats and the "Fake News Media."

One big problem there – Trump appeared to be running with an unconfirmed, and we now know inaccurate, Fox News report that morning suggesting that the rented pickup truck used had entered the country from Mexico two days before the attack.

The president-elect connected dots to draw a picture he wanted while either not having or not caring about accurate information.

Fox News acknowledged error; don't expect Trump to do so

Fox News did the right thing, walking back that claim and clarifying in follow-up reports later last Wednesday, including one that seemed to be speaking directly to Trump about how he had falsely framed his claim.

But Trump would never acknowledge a mistake that plays to his base, that stokes fear while ignoring facts. So he just kept posting on Thursday about immigration, painting America as a nation in decline with his threadbare only-I-can-fix-it nonsense.

Cyclists ride past a police sign seeking information on a terrorist attack on Halloween 2017, when a man plowed a rental truck down a bike path in New York City and killed eight people. JEWEL SAMAD/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Remember that 2017 attack in New York? Sayfullo Saipov, an immigrant from Uzbekistan, was in this country with a legal visa when he murdered those people. He's now serving a life sentence at a federal prison in Colorado.

Trump seems to have forgotten about Saipov. While campaigning again for president in 2023 and 2024, he repeatedly claimed that there were no acts of terrorism during his first term.

Trump made that claim on the campaign trail in New Hampshire in October 2023, which fact-checkers for CNN easily refuted, citing recognized acts of terrorism during his term.

Trump could care less about facts. He made the same claim twice while campaigning in Iowa last January, including during a Fox News town hall (where he faced no fact-checkers).

Do you remember the bitter joke that often circulated during Trump's first term, born of his own 2016 campaign vow to be "so presidential" and disciplined that Americans would be bored in the campaign?

This was never going to happen. Trump doesn't have it within him to be the archetype of a statesman, a steady steward of American democracy and values. He couldn't muster that if he tried. And he has never shown any interest in trying.

So, four more years of fact-free, self-absorbed, bitterly divisive fearmongering. We've been here before. We drove ourselves back there again.

Nothing is ever Trump's fault

Nothing terrible that happens on Trump's watch – and terrible things happen on every president's watch – will ever be his fault. He will publicly whinge about them if he sees an opportunity to blame his foes. But then he'll just flat out act as if they never happened if they reflect poorly on his approach to the presidency.

There's a market for this. That's why Trump does it.

There's a portion of Americans who desperately want to believe that America is in its dying days, and that the former and future president is the only person capable of resuscitation.

But every president wins by building a coalition. Many people gave Trump another try, even if they didn't embrace the teeth gnashing and apprehension at the heart of his "Make America Great Again" movement.

Trump is their president, too.

And they have four years to think about that choice.

Follow USA TODAY elections columnist Chris Brennan on X, formerly known as Twitter: @ByChrisBrennan

USA TODAY

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Small airline seats become growing problem for flyers

There's an increasing realization that cramped spaces threaten our health and safety. **Page 3B**

You can check the headlines from your home state or city

We survey and compile the top news stories from all 50 states plus Washington, D.C. **Page 4B**

MONEYLINE

JOE RAEDLE/GETTY IMAGES

FORD RECALL INVOLVES NEARLY 400,000 VEHICLES

Ford Motor Company has issued multiple recalls involving nearly 400,000 vehicles, including more than 295,000 heavy-duty pickup trucks. The automaker is recalling 295,449 of its 2020-2022 F-Super Duty F250, F350, F450, F550 and F600 trucks, and its 2021-2022 F-650 and F750 trucks because biodiesel deposits may form on the pump drivetrain roller components, which could lead to failure of the high-pressure fuel pump, Ford said in a recall report filed with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA). Failure of the pump may result in loss of drive power, which can increase the risk of a crash, an NHTSA report said. Dealers will update the powertrain control module software free of charge. Owner notification letters are expected to be mailed on Jan. 13. Owners may contact Ford customer service at 1-866-436-7332. Ford's number for this recall is 24S78.

COURT OF APPEALS STRIKES DOWN NET NEUTRALITY

A federal appeals court struck down the Federal Communications Commission's net neutrality rules that prevented internet service providers from throttling or blocking some content or charging more to deliver it. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit said Thursday that the FCC lacked the authority to reinstate the Obama-era rules, dealing a final blow to a decade-long effort to gain greater oversight over the internet. Long the source of partisan tensions, the net neutrality rules were repealed in Donald Trump's first term. President Joe Biden signed a 2021 executive order encouraging the FCC to reinstate them, which the FCC voted to do along party lines in April. Democrats want greater oversight of internet service providers while Republicans reject the idea that they should be regulated similar to phone companies. The appeals court's decision is an early win for the incoming Trump administration, which has vowed to roll back Biden regulations. The decision does not affect state laws in California, Colorado and Washington.

ALCOHOL STOCKS FALL AFTER CANCER ADVISORY

Shares of European and American spirits makers and brewers fell on Friday after the U.S. surgeon general called for cancer warnings on the labels of alcoholic drinks. The consumption of alcoholic drinks increases the risk of developing breast, colon, liver and other cancers, U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy said in an advisory. "For certain cancers, like breast, mouth and throat cancers, evidence shows that the risk of developing cancer may start to increase around one or fewer drinks per day," according to the advisory. Shares of Jack Daniel's parent Brown-Forman slipped nearly 3% to $37.10 in early U.S. trading hours, their lowest since April 2017, while Coors Light beer maker Molson Coors fell 2.7%. Constellation Brands, the maker of Corona beer, slipped 1.3%. The decision to update the label will be made by Congress.

LUKAS BARTH/REUTERS

Economy set for a strong 2025

President-elect Donald Trump speaks at Turning Point USA's AmericaFest in Phoenix on Dec. 22. CHENEY ORR/REUTERS

However, some Trump plans could hamper growth in second half of year

Paul Davidson USA TODAY

The U.S. economy and job market are expected to cool in 2025 but still turn in another year of solid growth as inflation eases further, forecasters say. • But as a result of President-elect Donald Trump's dueling policy agendas, the outlook is leavened with an unusual dose of uncertainty. • Trump's plans to impose massive tariffs and deport millions of immigrants who lack permanent legal status are likely to reignite inflation and dampen economic growth, according to forecasters. Yet his pledge to extend and expand the sweeping tax cuts passed in his first term and ease the regulatory burden on businesses could juice the economy and have mixed effects on inflation.

So, which of the incoming administration's contrasting policy agendas is likely to move the needle for the economy this year?

"The only certainty is uncertainty," said Ryan Sweet, chief U.S. economist of Oxford Economics.

"If the focus is more on deregulation, tax cuts and potential sweeteners than changes to tariffs and immigration, then growth could be much stronger in 2025," Diane Swonk, chief economist of KMPG U.S., wrote in a report. "Otherwise, risks are for higher inflation and weaker expansion."

How will the economy do in 2025?

Generally, forecasters see 2025 as a transition year as the economy continues its post-pandemic recovery but at a lower temperature before Trump's policies fully take effect. For workers, healthy wage growth is likely to keep outpacing slowing inflation, fueling consumer spending and job gains. The Federal Reserve's interest rate cuts, which began in 2024 and are set to continue this year assuming inflation eases further, should provide a boost to growth.

Meanwhile, Trump is likely to rein in the scope of the tariffs and deportations he promised on the campaign trail, some economists say. And the programs likely will take months to ramp up, delaying their toll on the economy and inflation until the second half of the year.

Instead of the recession Moody's Analytics forecast a few months ago, the research firm now foresees a more slowly growing economy in 2025.

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Research pinpoints crypto's backbone

Bitcoin's base is male, millennial, Republican

Daniel de Visé
USA TODAY

Ask yourself which Americans are most enamored of crypto, and a few descriptors may come to mind: millennials. Techies. Guys.

Republicans? Maybe not.

But new research from the University of Pennsylvania finds that Republicans are more likely than Democrats to invest in cryptocurrency and that some regions are more inclined than others to hop on the bandwagon. Texans, for example, are fonder of bitcoin than Oregonians.

The study may help explain why President-elect Donald Trump has loudly signaled his support for crypto.

"I think Trump was a follower on this," said David Reibstein, a marketing professor at Penn's Wharton School who participated in the research. "I think he discovered his base was much more pro-crypto."

Reibstein and his colleagues have spent two years collecting data about crypto from surveys of more than 22,000 Americans.

Among their key findings:

- Republicans are more likely than Democrats to own crypto, by a margin of 41% to 32%.
- Conservatives are more confident than liberals in crypto.
- Crypto is most popular in Texas and across the Southeast. It's least popular in parts of the Northeast, such as Connecticut and New Hampshire, and in the Pacific Northwest.

Who loves crypto? Millennials and men

The Wharton researchers assembled a detailed demographic and political profile of the typical American crypto investor.

Some of their findings match common wisdom about the crypto community. Men, for example, are more than twice as likely as women to own crypto, according to the Penn surveys.

Millennials are the most ardent crypto fans. People from 25 to 44 are most likely to invest in crypto, the researchers found, followed by people 45 to 64, a span that includes members of Generation X and the youngest baby boomers.

Seniors and young adults 18 to 24 are least likely to own crypto, but probably for different reasons. Older Americans tend to mistrust crypto, Reibstein said, while young adults may lack the funds to buy it.

And why do Republicans like crypto? The reason, Reibstein said, has a lot to do with decentralization.

Cryptocurrency is digital money. It

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Selecting best big-ship cruise line is as crucial as picking destination

Nathan Diller
USA TODAY

On a given day at PortMiami, the cruise capital of the world, cruise ships line up shoreside to disembark guests and welcome others. From a distance, with their towering hulls and rows of skyward decks, they might look similar.

While major cruise operators have many features in common, there are differences that can have implications for passengers' vacations. RacQuelle Major-Holland, owner of Major Adventures Travel Agency, said picking the right cruise line and ship can be as important as the destination.

"I do think that cruising should be a balance of looking at the itinerary but also looking to see, 'Do I want to be on board a family ship?' " she told USA TODAY. " 'Do I want to be around a bunch of kids, or do I want something more laid back and easygoing, you know, because I want to relax and read a book?' "

MSC, including its Seashore ship, has been growing its U.S. presence. But RacQuelle Major-Holland, owner of Major Adventures Travel Agency, said the cruise line, which has headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, attracts more of an international crowd.
PROVIDED BY MSC CRUISES

Here are some of the key differences between four of the most popular mainstream cruise lines. Travelers should note, however, programming and activities may vary by ship and itinerary.

Carnival Cruise Line

Carnival is known as the "Fun Ship," and it lives up to the name. "It's going to be, like, back-to-back, nonstop activities," Major-Holland said.

Those include deck festivities such as the '80s Rock-N-Glow Party, Family Feud Live, karaoke, a bean bag toss,

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Crypto

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isn't issued by governments or banks, so there's no central authority. It exists on decentralized networks and uses a technology called blockchain, which tracks transactions and assets.

"And it's hard to separate decentralization from political affiliation," Reibstein said. Republicans tend to favor decentralized government.

'The origin of bitcoin is libertarian'

The Penn research shows conservative Americans are fans of "distributed trust."

Many conservatives, the researchers found, would rather see trust divvied up among many individual entities than concentrated in a large one, such as the Federal Reserve or a multinational bank.

That notion squares with well-worn stereotypes of conservatives favoring state rights over federal power and small government over big.

"The origin of bitcoin is libertarian," said Hanna Halaburda, associate professor of technology, operations and statistics at New York University's Stern School of Business.

Libertarianism prizes civil liberties and free markets and eschews government regulation and overreach.

Halaburda cites Texas, which has emerged as a leader in the crypto industry, as perhaps the quintessential crypto-libertarian state.

Crypto movement 'is anti-establishment stuff'

The Penn research casts liberals and Democrats as defenders of the banking industry and the Fed, at least in the context of crypto. That finding might seem counterintuitive, given that progressives, historically, have taken pride in challenging authority.

In the case of crypto, countercultural thinking emanates from the right.

"The idea here is for people to organize themselves and conduct transactions without using banks," said Jim Harper, a crypto expert and senior nonresident fellow at the right-leaning American Enterprise Institute.

"This is about replacing the banking industry with software. This is anti-establishment stuff."

During the Vietnam War, hippies positioned themselves as anti-establishment and leftist. Harper sees conservative crypto fans of today as "Trumpian-style hippies."

Both he and Reibstein believe Trump embraced crypto belatedly as a means to stay in sync with his base. In his first term as president, Trump opposed crypto and said the digital currency was "based on thin air."

In his second term, Trump has vowed to make America the "crypto capital of the planet" and accumulate a national stockpile of bitcoin.

"Trump figured it out and made his overture to the bitcoin community in the last election," Harper said. "They were all there, waiting for him."

Trump's support of crypto broadened its popularity among Republicans. In monthly surveys, the Penn researchers found that the share of Republicans who owned crypto rose in the final months of 2024, from about 36% in August and September to 43% in December, a month after Trump was elected to another term in the White House.

Would you take your paycheck in crypto?

One lingering question for the Penn researchers is whether most Americans view crypto as a currency or an investment. "There are about 38,000 ATMs that take crypto," Reibstein said. He saw one at a Costco the other day.

As more crypto cash machines come online, Reibstein said, "I think people are going to start to view it more as a currency than they do today."

But Americans' confidence in crypto is not absolute.

For example, 54% of respondents told Penn researchers they would be comfortable making an online purchase with crypto. However, just 7% said they would be willing to take their salaries in crypto.

Harper, the crypto scholar, noted that he previously worked for the Bitcoin Foundation, a nonprofit advocacy group. He was paid partly in bitcoin.

"My wife made me transfer it into dollars straightaway," he said.

Cruises

Continued from Page 1B

bingo and more. Some ships also have high-tech options, such as its BOLT: Ultimate Sea Coaster, but the line's Fun Squad and other employees really set the tone, according to Major-Holland.

"Carnival, I think the crew is what brings out the fun more so than having those features," she said.

Alyssa Griffin, who makes videos about cruising with her husband, Cullen, on their YouTube channel, Griff & Alyssa, added the line does "fast, quick food service very well." The couple pointed to Big Chicken, a casual chicken joint from the line's Chief Fun Officer Shaquille O'Neal, as an example.

Families will find plenty to do, to be sure, but grown-ups who want to relax can do so at spaces including the Serenity Adult-Only Retreat. The relatively reasonable fares also may be attractive to budget-conscious travelers, Major-Holland noted.

"I think it's a good introductory line for people who've never done a cruise before," said Alyssa Griffin.

Royal Caribbean International

When it comes to large vessels, Royal Caribbean is a reigning title holder: The cruise line launched the world's biggest cruise ship, Icon of the Seas, in January. The company followed that about six months later with Utopia of the Seas, the second biggest.

"They kind of lead the way with what I would classify as megaships," said Cullen Griffin. The cruise line takes onboard features like slides and rides to the next level, from Icon's Category 6 water park – billed as the largest at sea – to Crown's Edge, where guests can walk more than 150 feet above the ocean. Utopia even has an immersive train-car dining experience built into the ship.

In spaces like the Royal Promenade, guests may even forget they're on a cruise. "It gives you more of a feel of a city on the water or city at sea," Major-Holland said.

That could be especially helpful for passengers who are nervous about being on a ship.

The Griffins shouted out the line's entertainment as particularly high quality, from Broadway musicals and ice skating shows to performances with aerial dancing and high diving.

Those kinds of features can come at a premium, though. "So it's not necessarily for the most budget-conscious because (even) their middle-age to older ships are going to be a lot more expensive than, like, if you're on Carnival."

Norwegian Cruise Line

Norwegian is a bit more laid back, Major-Holland said. The cruise line introduced "Freestyle Cruising" more than 20 years ago, ushering in a more flexible approach to dining times, attire and other elements of cruising.

Even so, she noted that its "dining experience is a bit elevated." (I can confirm that the Indian food I tried at Indulge Food Hall on its Norwegian Viva ship is some of the best I've ever had.)

Norwegian boasts exciting activities of its own, too, from The Drop – an exhilarating free-fall dry slide – to go-karts and the Galaxy Pavilion virtual reality arcade. "They're known for their Broadway productions as well," Major-Holland added.

The cruise line also has invested in offerings for solo travelers, Cullen Griffin said, and has a wide range of single-occupancy cabins.

The price point tends to be higher than Carnival, according to Major-Holland, but Norwegian's Free at Sea package – which the company recently announced is becoming More at Sea – that allows guests to bundle extras like Wi-Fi and specialty dining meals can make it feel more inclusive.

MSC Cruises

MSC has been rapidly growing its U.S. presence in recent years. But Major-Holland said the cruise line, which has headquarters in Geneva, said "they attract more of an international crowd."

The cruise line also is affordable, the Griffins said. They booked a weeklong cruise in a balcony cabin on MSC Seashore with their daughter earlier this year for less than $1,500.

Even so, the line offers some premium experiences. For example, Cullen Griffin said the high chairs and booster seats, which might typically be hard plastic, were cushioned (the line has a partnership with baby product brand Chicco). The MSC Yacht Club, its luxe ship-within-a-ship concept, gives guests a more exclusive, pampering experience with all the perks of a big cruise ship – though other lines, such as Norwegian, have similar offerings.

Economy

Continued from Page 1B

"The economy is in a good place and consumers will again do their part to drive the economic train," Moody's Chief Economist Mark Zandi said. But, he added: "It won't grow as much as it should because of economic policy."

Will tariffs increase?

During the campaign, Trump vowed to impose 60% tariffs on Chinese imports and 10% levies on shipments from all other countries to prod manufacturers to move production back to the U.S. Recently, he threatened 25% tariffs on Canada and Mexico and 10% fees on China to pressure the countries to curtail the flow of illegal drugs and unauthorized immigration to the U.S.

Ultimately, Zandi figures Trump will hit China with 20% tariffs while Sweet is looking for 30% duties. The economists also expect smaller levies on Canada, Mexico and parts of Europe, as well as Asian nations such as Vietnam and Japan that could serve as alternative production sources to China.

Trump is sensitive to the performance of the economy and stock market and is likely to soften the tariffs if they hammer those closely watched gauges, Zandi and Sweet said.

Is immigration to the US increasing or decreasing?

Trump will also probably moderate his immigration strategy since deporting up to 11 million migrants who lack permanent legal status would be a logistical nightmare, the economists said.

Zandi expects about 500,000 deportations per year, along with tougher constraints on border crossings, lowering annual net immigration to about 700,000 from an average 2.5 million a year during President's Joe Biden term and 1.2 million historically.

Are federal taxes going down?

By contrast, tax cuts likely won't stoke growth until 2026 since the tax reform Trump spearheaded in his first term expires at the end of 2025, Sweet and Zandi said.

Later this year, Trump and a Republican Congress are expected to extend lower tax rates for all income levels, and possibly increase immediate write-offs for business capital investments, and lower the corporate tax rate from 21% to 15%.

Trump also could loosen regulations for the oil and gas industry, banks and tech companies as early as this year but mostly in 2026, spurring more investment, Sweet said. However, opening more federal land to oil drilling may do little to reduce gasoline prices.

Already, the stock market and small-business confidence have leaped since Trump's election, possibly triggering more investment and hiring as early as 2025, the economists said.

How much is the US economy expected to grow?

What's the bottom line?

Economists predict the economy will grow a solid 2.1% this year, down from an estimated 2.7% in 2024, according to the average forecast of those surveyed by Wolters Kluwer Blue Chip Economic Indicators. Sturdy gains in the first half should give way to a weaker showing later in the year as tariffs and immigration limits take effect, Zandi said. He estimates those policies will reduce economic growth by about half a percentage point.

In 2026, Zandi figures the negative effects of tariffs and an immigration crackdown for a full year will more than offset the positive bump from tax cuts and deregulation, helping push down growth to 1.6%. Sweet has the opposite view, reckoning favorable tax and regulatory policy will power the economy to a 2.7% gain next year.

Here's a closer look at how key parts of the economy could perform in 2025.

Inflation

The Fed's preferred measure of annual inflation overall has eased from a 40-year high of 7.1 % in early 2022 to 2.4% in November due mostly to the resolution of pandemic-related supply chain snarls and labor shortages that pushed up wages.

That pullback is likely to continue as pay increases slow further and spikes in service prices, such as rent and auto insurance, pull back, JPMorgan Chase economist Michael Feroli wrote in a research note.

But U.S. manufacturers, retailers and other companies socked with import tariffs are expected to pass most of those costs to consumers through higher prices, Zandi and Sweet said. And less immigration will likely mean a smaller labor supply that should keep wage growth elevated, the forecasters said. Companies could pass their higher labor costs to consumers.

As a result, after edging down through the first half of 2025, Zandi estimates yearly inflation will climb back to 2.4% by December. Inflation, he projects, won't return to the Fed's 2% target until 2029.

But Feroli doesn't believe Trump's harsher immigration stance will have a notable effect on prices. He expects inflation to fall to 2.2% this year.

Consumer spending

For two years, inflation outpaced wage growth, leaving many Americans struggling to make ends meet. Since May 2023, that dynamic has flipped, giving consumers more purchasing power. In November, while overall prices increased 2.4% from a year earlier, average hourly wages grew 4%, government figures show.

That's largely expected to continue this year, helping support consumption, which makes up about 70% of economic activity. Strong growth in productivity – or output per worker – could allow employers to maintain 4% pay increases without raising prices as sharply, the economists said.

But most of the spending gains will come from higher-income households, which have benefited from rising stock and home prices, Zandi and Sweet said. Low- to middle-income people will continue to struggle with record credit card debt and high delinquencies, though lower interest rates should ease their burden somewhat, Zandi said.

Yet by raising prices, tariffs will reduce consumers' buying power and purchases, he said. And less immigration means losing the spending of migrants who have bolstered consumption.

All told, economists estimate consumer spending will increase a healthy 2.4% this year, down from an estimated 2.6% in 2024, according to those surveyed. Consumption would be about a half point higher if not for the tariffs and immigration curbs, Zandi said.

The job market

Average monthly job growth is projected to slow from about 173,000 this past fall to 100,000 by the end of the year, Moody's estimates. A wave of catch-up hiring following massive layoffs early in the pandemic has run its course, Feroli said.

And less consumer spending means businesses won't need as many workers.

The labor force – the pool of Americans working and looking for jobs – is likely to grow even more slowly because of the immigration restraints, Zandi said. In other words, many businesses again could struggle to find workers, especially in industries that rely heavily on immigrants, such as restaurants, hotels, construction and agriculture, Moody's said in a report.

Zandi expects the labor force to grow 0.5% a year during Trump's term, down from 2% in recent years.

At the same time, many federal workers could lose jobs if Trump follows through on hiring freezes and furloughs, said Moody's economist Dante DeAntonio.

Economists surveyed by Wolters Kluwer expect the average unemployment rate to rise to a still-low 4.3% in 2025 from 4% last year.

Business investment

Businesses will face conflicting forces.

Extending the tax cuts and easing regulations should combine with lower borrowing costs to boost capital spending, Sweet said. And a recent factory building boom spawned by federal subsidies for chip and clean-energy production should spur purchases of equipment to fill the plants, he and Zandi said.

At the same time, the uncertainty generated by the tariff and immigration policies could slow business outlays, Zandi said.

All told, business investment is projected to grow a solid 2.8%, down from an estimated 3.9% in 2024, according to the Wolters Kluwer survey.

Interest rates

After lowering their key interest rate by a percentage point since September, Fed officials revised their median forecast from four quarter-point cuts to just two this year. Fed Chair Jerome Powell said some officials may have factored in an inflation bump caused by the tariff and immigration plans.

Fewer rate cuts would mean less juice for a slowing economy.

FLYING

Small airline seats are a growing problem

Less space could create health and safety issues

Christopher Elliott
Special to USA TODAY

A passenger on the author's recent flight from Helsinki to Copenhagen.
CHRISTOPHER ELLIOTT/SPECIAL TO USA TODAY

Pamela Vetter deals with small airline seats like many passengers: She pretends they don't exist.

"I have a fully charged phone, and I just watch a movie," said Vetter, vice president of a networking organization in Los Angeles. "I immerse myself in it to distract me from the small seats."

But lately it has been getting harder to make believe small airline seats aren't a problem. On her recent flight from Chicago to Los Angeles, the economy seats felt narrower and offered less legroom than ever.

"My knees nearly touched the seat in front of me," she said. "Then, when the person in front of me reclined, it got even worse, so it was challenging to lower my tray table when the fight attendants offered us drinks."

She's right. Planes don't just feel more cramped than ever – they *are* more cramped. There's also a growing realization that small seats pose a real threat to our health and safety. And while there are ways to beat the system, the ultimate fix isn't up to passengers.

Why are airline seats getting smaller?

Fewer than half of airline passengers can now reasonably fit in seats, according to FlyersRights, a nonprofit organization that closely tracks airline seat sizes. "Airlines continue to shrink passenger space to force more people to pay more to upgrade to more legroom or larger seats," said Paul Hudson, president of FlyersRights.

But why are the seats tighter than ever? There's one obvious explanation: Back in 2022, Congress asked the Federal Aviation Administration to set a minimum seat size, but that didn't happen. Airlines have long interpreted a lack of minimum requirements as a license to squeeze their seats closer together – so they have.

Is there a solution? Yes, but it won't be easy.

The flight that changed everything for me

We could have a polite discussion about shrinking seat sizes, but instead, let me tell you a story about a trip that brought this problem into sharp focus for me.

I recently flew from Helsinki to Copenhagen, Denmark. As I boarded the aircraft, I noticed the uncomfortably thin and narrow seats. Like Vetter, after sitting down, I could feel the seat in front of me pushing against my knees. There was no room to lean back. Then I saw the passenger behind me struggling to fit into his seat.

I turned and saw him protruding into the aisle.

I felt sorry for the traveler and for the guy next to him. I also empathized with the passengers who had to squeeze around this traveler when accessing the lavatory.

And clearly, there were some safety issues here – a *lot* of safety issues.

That flight changed the way I feel about seat size. Small seats are a safety hazard, and it's just a matter of time before people die.

'The FAA failed us'

In the U.S., we had a chance to address shrinking seat sizes, according to Bill McGee, a senior fellow for aviation at the American Economic Liberties Project.

"But the FAA defied logic with a study that concluded tighter airline seats do not impede evacuations during an emergency," he said.

McGee said the problem is that the government hasn't updated its testing methodologies to reflect egress from airline cabins in the 2020s – particularly because tighter seats are now coupled with larger Americans and record-high passenger loads. "Tighter seats are uncomfortable, a financial rip-off and a health threat due to blood clotting issues," he said. "But worst of all, they present a danger to safe evacuations."

So, is there a way to survive your next flight without getting cramped, suffering a blood clot – or worse?

How to find space on a flight

Even as the amount of personal space shrinks, there is a way to find more room. But it's not easy.

- **Look for the "secret" seats.** If upgrading isn't in your budget, try getting an aisle or emergency exit row seat. Exit row seats have more legroom but are not wider than the average economy class seat. (As a bonus, there are no children in the exit row seats, so you might be able to sleep better.)
- **Improvise.** Look, economy class seats were not designed for your comfort. They're designed for airlines' profit. So channel your inner MacGyver, said Andy Abramson, a frequent air traveler who runs a communications consultancy in Las Vegas. "I try to make myself more comfortable by putting my coat behind me like a pillow," he said. "I've also found that rolling up a magazine or newspaper and placing it in the small of my back offers some relief." But for long flights, it's still pure torture. There just isn't enough space.
- **Pay for it.** If you can afford a seat in the economy "comfort" or "plus" – which gives you about the same seat pitch as economy class a few decades ago – then experts recommend you do. Of course, that's what the airlines *want* you to do.

But these are imperfect ways around a flawed system. The fact is, we're getting bigger, and the seats are getting smaller.

Airlines are wrong about seat size

Maybe the U.S. government and other aviation enforcement bodies lack the courage to set minimum seat standards. But airlines must know they are on the wrong side of history.

We've been here before. In the 19th century, greedy landlords in New York could rent tenements with poor lighting, inadequate ventilation and no indoor bathrooms. The cramped apartments were breeding grounds for disease but highly profitable to owners.

But in 1901, a progressive government passed laws that set minimum size requirements for tenements and required adequate lighting, ventilation and indoor bathrooms. And today, even the most ardent airline apologist couldn't imagine living in a rental without these basic amenities.

Passengers can continue trying to beat the system by booking the secret seats with a little extra legroom or angling for an upgrade. What this problem needs, however, is clearheaded, thoughtful government regulation.

And airlines need to do the right thing – before someone gets hurt.

Biden signs Social Security measure that boosts benefits to some in US

Bailey Schulz
USA TODAY

President Joe Biden signed a bill Sunday that boosts Social Security benefits for millions of public sector workers in what the White House described as the first expansion of such benefits in 20 years.

The Social Security Fairness Act eliminates two decades-old provisions – the Windfall Elimination Provision and the Government Pension Offset – that reduced Social Security benefits for some retirees who also received pension income. Police officers, firefighters, postal workers and public school teachers are among the nearly 3 million affected by the provisions.

"The bill I'm signing today is about a simple proposition: Americans who have worked hard all their lives to earn an honest living should be able to retire with economic security and dignity," Biden said.

Biden said the bill should lead to an estimated average monthly increase of $360 for certain public employees and their spouses and survivors. More than 2.5 million Americans are set to receive a lump sum payment worth "thousands of dollars" to make up for the shortfall and the benefits they should have received last year, Biden said.

The bill, passed by the House of Representatives in November, was approved in the Senate by a 70-26 vote last month. Some senators who voted against the legislation argued it would unfairly benefit some workers while increasing burdens for others on Social Security, and jeopardize the Social Security fund overall.

The bill will cost $196 billion over the next 10 years, according to estimates by the Congressional Budget Office.

Contributing: Riley Beggin and Medora Lee, USA TODAY; Reuters

Spoon will give you a shock, literally

Kirin hopes device ends up being worth its salt

Jennifer Jolly
Special to USA TODAY

At CES 2025, Kirin's Electric Salt Spoon asks, "What if you wanted more salt on your food but were open to a mild electric shock instead?"
JENNIFER JOLLY/SPECIAL TO USA TODAY

CES always offers such a massive mix of gadgets and new tech tools that it's often equal parts totally awesome and absolutely overwhelming. During the early days, before the official start of the show – Jan. 7 this year – thousands of reporters like me mill around a massive convention center and other hot spots in Las Vegas, wondering what gadget will steal the show.

Sometimes it's a really cool TV, a phone with more than one screen or maybe a robot. Heck, the must-see gadget in 2015 was a belt of all things. There's really no telling what it will be until you see it.

This year? It's a spoon.

Getting salty at CES 2025

Kirin's Electric Salt Spoon asks, "What if you wanted more salt on your food but were open to a mild electric shock instead?"

We all need sodium to function, and depending on the type of cuisine you favor, you may be getting a bit too much salt for your doctor's liking. I'm not going to dive into the implications for heart ailments here, but suffice it to say that there are many, many people who should eat less salt.

There are few substitutes for that most beloved taste sensation, though. Salt is the bedrock of seasoning. Rather than replace it with a different mineral or spice, Japanese company Kirin invented a spoon that uses electricity to mimic the sensation of salt hitting your tongue. It literally shocks your taste buds into thinking your food is saltier than it really is.

Science vs. senses

Trying out the Electric Salt Spoon is more complicated than you can imagine. First, you have to ensure the spoon end is properly affixed to the bulky handle housing all the tech.

Then, select one of four levels of saltiness and be sure you're holding the spoon juuuuuust right. If you don't do it correctly, the light on the handle stays blue instead of shifting to white – your signal to go in for a taste. Only then can you try to figure out if it works as advertised.

So... does it actually work?

Yeah... kind of. Getting it to work consistently takes practice, but when I did *everything* correctly, the electric stimulation did actually "taste" like salt, if only for the moment that my lips touched the spoon. The rest of the time I just spilled lukewarm soup down my face, hoping it wouldn't shock something other than my tongue.

It's fair to say that Kirin wins the weird tech honor so far this year, as it garnered the biggest crowd at the reporter-only Unveiled event last night. It seems like everywhere I go today, someone inevitably asks if I've tried "the salt spoon."

The answer is "yes," and also, it's weird. If it could make me think I'm eating chocolate cake instead of broccoli, now that would be GENIUS.

Jennifer Jolly is an Emmy Award-winning consumer tech columnist and on-air contributor for the "Today" show. The views and opinions expressed in this column are the author's and do not necessarily reflect those of USA TODAY. Contact her at JJ@Techish.com or @JennJolly on Instagram.

50★States

News from across the USA

ALABAMA Montgomery: A nursing student from Alabama was crowned Miss America 2025. Abbie Stockard, 22, who represented Alabama during the 2025 Miss America Pageant, won the title Sunday in Florida.

ALASKA Kalskag: Alaska State Troopers said a 15-year-old boy from Aniak died over the weekend after he fell through the ice on the Kuskokwim River while driving a snow machine, KYUK reported.

ARIZONA Phoenix: Six critically burned patients arrived in Phoenix from Hawaii on Saturday, following a New Year's Eve firework tragedy that left three dead and over 20 injured.

ARKANSAS Lowell: Police said a 72-year-old man has been arrested in connection with a death at a home, KNWA reported.

CALIFORNIA Los Angeles: In January 2024, the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development estimated approximately 187,00 people were experiencing homelessness in California, a 3% increase from the previous year. California accounts for about 25% of the nation's homeless population and has the highest number of unhoused people in the nation, and Los Angeles has the second-largest homeless population of any city in the U.S. and first in the state, with approximately 75,000 people.

COLORADO Colorado Springs: A group took the first step to repeal Colorado's wolf reintroduction program Friday, just over a year after Colorado's first reintroduced wolves were released on the Western Slope as mandated by a 2020 voter-approved ballot initiative. Colorado Advocates for Smart Wolf Policy has submitted a draft statutory proposition for the measure to be placed on the state's 2026 ballot.

CONNECTICUT East Hartford: Hundreds of runners participated in the Snow Dash 5k Road Race on Sunday to honor a police officer who was killed in the line of duty in 1999, WTNH reported.

DELAWARE Dover: Delaware Marijuana Commissioner Rob Coupe will step down later this month as the industry continues its momentum toward opening.

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA Washington: A massive crowd gathered Monday at Meridian Hill Park for a snowball fight hosted by the DC Snowball Fight Association, DC News Now reported.

FLORIDA Tallahassee: Despite seven attempts by various lawmakers to dethrone it over a 25-year span, the northern mockingbird still reigns as the official bird of Florida. State Rep. Jim Mooney hopes the eighth time's the charm. Mooney filed legislation for the 2025 legislative session to make the American flamingo the official state bird and the Florida scrub-jay the official state songbird.

GEORGIA Augusta: President Joe Biden has signed a bill into law requiring the continued upkeep of Augusta's New Savannah Bluff Lock and Dam. Under the new Thomas R. Carper Water Resources Development Act of 2024, the 87-year-old lock and dam will be fully repaired to keep the pool level along Augusta's riverfront at 114.5 feet.

HAWAII Honolulu: The Hawaii Nurses' Association announced that Wilcox Medical Center nurses voted to authorize a strike over unfair labor practices, Hawaii News Now reported. The three-day strike will begin on Jan. 14, according to the news outlet.

IDAHO Boise: The Idaho State Department of Agriculture confirmed that the state's second case of chronic wasting disease has been detected in an adult cow elk that died at a captive facility that was already under surveillance, KTVB reported.

ILLINOIS East Peoria: An East Peoria nursing home is set to close in March after the property owner sold the facility to a new group that will steer it away from senior housing.

INDIANA St. Joseph County: County officials are considering a unique kind of interchange at Indiana 2 and Larrison Road – at the edge of the future GM/Samsung battery plant – that motorists have never seen in this area. The design would emphasize safe left turns, because the area is due to see heavy truck traffic. The "diverging diamond" interchange would be a first in a 13-county region in Northern Indiana from the Illinois line to Logansport, according to the state Department of Transportation.

HIGHLIGHT: NORTH CAROLINA

Lions Bridge at Greenfield Park was identified as an immediate safety hazard and deemed beyond repair. MOLLY WILHELM/USA TODAY NETWORK

Wilmington: Lions Bridge at Greenfield Park, known for its stunning views of Greenfield Lake and frequent sightings of wildlife, is set to be demolished. Also referred to as "turtle bridge" and "alligator bridge," the approximately 210-foot structure is estimated to have been constructed in the 1960s. Lions Bridge was closed indefinitely to the public in October 2023 "after a routine inspection uncovered a broken pile that's causing a significant slope at the entrance to the bridge," according to a Facebook post from the city. The bridge was identified as an immediate safety hazard and deemed beyond repair.

IOWA Des Moines: Iowa has passed over another chance to join the federal Summer EBT program despite demands from nonprofit and charity groups who say those millions of dollars in food aid are key to feeding Iowa's children when schools are out. The state had until Jan. 1 to notify the U.S. Department of Agriculture of its intent to participate in the program. Gov. Kim Reynolds instead remains steadfast on expanding a new initiative distributing boxes of food to eligible low-income families through churches, community centers and other locations over the summer.

KANSAS Topeka: Topeka's past two years have both been among its warmest on record. Last year, 2024, was Topeka's second-warmest year since the National Weather Service began keeping records in 1887. The previous year, 2023, is tied for the capital city's fourth-warmest on record, says the weather service's Topeka office.

KENTUCKY Louisville: Louisville has long been known for bourbon. Now it's popping up as a destination for the bubbly stuff. Two spots in town were named among the best Champagne bars in the country in a recent write-up from Wine Enthusiast. Of the seven Champagne hangouts praised by the acclaimed wine-focused publication, The Champagnery and Nouvelle Bar & Bottle were included as the top bars pouring sparkling sips.

LOUISIANA New Orleans: Louisiana Lt. Gov. Bill Nungesser said New Orleans Mayor LaToya Cantrell failed to do enough to protect the city's residents and visitors from the New Year's morning terrorist attack that killed at least 15 and injured dozens more.

MAINE York: York Hospital has been recognized with the Women's Choice Award for Best Hospitals 2025 in several categories, including comprehensive care, heart care, mammogram imaging, minimally invasive surgery, and outpatient experience.

MARYLAND Baltimore: Maryland's U.S. attorney said that violent crime has decreased 32% since 2021 thanks to collaboration among agencies statewide, WBAL reported.

MASSACHUSETTS New Bedford: Herman Melville's life-size statue will adorn the grounds of New Bedford's historic Seamen's Bethel where the author stopped before going out to sea, and which was the inspiration for the Whaleman's Chapel in his literary masterpiece, "Moby Dick."

MICHIGAN Lansing: Michigan saw a drop in fatal traffic crashes through the first nine months of 2024, though fatalities in early December were higher than in the previous year. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration recently released statistics on fatal crashes for the first nine months of 2024, showing a continued decrease in deaths in Michigan and nationwide.

MINNESOTA Ramsey County: A man pleaded guilty to second degree murder after two women were killed and their remains were stashed in storage units.

MISSISSIPPI Jackson: Jackson police are investigating a Saturday shooting that left one person dead and another injured at a grill and lounge.

MISSOURI Jefferson County: Authorities in Missouri overcame a "bananas situation" last week related to a wandering spider monkey wearing ballet attire. The Jefferson County Sheriff's Office found the monkey sporting a pink tutu.

MONTANA Cardwell: Authorities said a Washington man died after a single-vehicle crash in snowy, icy road conditions, KPAX reported.

NEBRASKA Lincoln: Gov. Jim Pillen announced that Jewel Rodgers of Omaha will be the new state poet, KOLN reported.

NEVADA Carson City: The U.S. Department of Justice announced an agreement with Nevada in which the state promised to improve services for children who have behavioral health disabilities.

NEW HAMPSHIRE Plaistow: A plan is in place to ensure continuous emergency services following Exeter Hospital's announcement last fall that it plans to end its advanced life support paramedic intercept service on March 20. The Plaistow Select Board unanimously voted to accept a $2 million grant from Exeter Health Resources to enable the town's fire department to establish its own paramedic intercept service.

NEW JERSEY Ocean County: Preconstruction surveys for the much-anticipated northern Ocean County beach replenishment are slated to begin in mid-January, with the dredge expected to arrive offshore on Feb. 5, according to a spokesman for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The $73.5 million project includes dredging and placing 2.1 million cubic yards of sand onto the beaches from the Manasquan to Barnegat inlets. The project is expected to take six to seven months.

NEW MEXICO Las Cruces: The city violated state transparency law, specifically, the Open Meetings Act, during its hiring process of City Manager Ikani Taumoepeau last year. According to a determination letter from the New Mexico Department of Justice, "The City Council's opaque process deprived the public of any opportunity to meaningfully participate in the selection of a new city manager. As a consequence of these violations, the city manager selection is invalid."

NEW YORK New York: New York City drivers on Monday had to pay $9 to enter Manhattan under the first such congestion fee in the U.S., which seeks to raise billions for mass transit and reduce traffic jams.

NORTH DAKOTA Bismarck: Officials said the new BNSF rail bridge connecting Bismarck and Mandan is halfway complete, KFYR reported.

OHIO Akron: Akron Public Schools Superintendent Michael Robinson is starting the new year under investigation. The school board announced in December it was launching an investigation against Robinson after recent unspecified allegations.

OKLAHOMA Tulsa: The Osage Nation has asked a federal judge to vacate a 16-year-old decision that the tribe's reservation had been disestablished, citing the U.S. Supreme Court ruling in the McGirt v. Oklahoma case. The Osage Nation filed its request in federal court in the Northern District of Oklahoma, based in Tulsa.

OREGON Salem: Rewards totaling more than $130,000 are being offered for information about a spate of wolf poaching incidents in Oregon. Environmental groups said wolf poaching had become a big hindrance to the growth of the state's wolf population, which has stayed static since 2020 at a minimum of 173 to 178 of the controversial apex predators.

PENNSYLVANIA Philadelphia: More than a year after being green-lit by local officials, the new logistics park on the site of the former Philadelphia State Hospital, better know by locals as Byberry Hospital, is nearing completion at the border of the city and Bucks County. The project should be finished by the fall, according to Heath Abramsohn, vice president and regional director with Rockefeller Group, a developer on the project.

RHODE ISLAND Tiverton: The demolition of one of the most iconic and historic properties in town is sparking outrage and calls for stricter protections. As the Sakonnet Times first reported, the Abraham Brown House was unceremoniously torn down on Dec. 18, shocking local residents and preservationists.

SOUTH CAROLINA Spartanburg: One of downtown Spartanburg's longest-standing and most iconic landmarks has been removed and demolished. Krispy Kreme owner Glenn Reese said he decided "it was time" to take down the sign at the doughnut shop his father opened in 1969. Hurricane Helene damaged the sign, and Reese was worried it had become a public safety hazard.

SOUTH DAKOTA Sioux Falls: Augustana University will start offering a master of social work degree this fall. The degree is part of its Harriet Emily Scott Social Work Program housed in the Sharon Lust School of Education.

TENNESSEE Nashville: A Tennessee representative has filed a bill to allow the Ten Commandments, along with other texts, to be displayed in public schools across the state.

TEXAS Round Rock: A snake is retiring after a 25-year career at the Round Rock Public Library. Rockss-sanne, a 4-foot ball python, has spent most of her life entertaining children. During story times, a staff member brings her out draped around their neck, said Andrea Warkentin, a youth services librarian. Rocksssanne's last day on display in a tank at the Round Rock library will be Feb. 28.

UTAH St. George: Officials said vandalism at two local parks will cost the city thousands of dollars to repair, KUTV reported.

VERMONT Burlington: U.S. Attorney for Vermont Nikolas Kerest has announced that he will be stepping down from his role, WCAX reported.

VIRGINIA Colonial Heights: One of the four nursing home employees jailed for elder abuse leading to a former patient's death has been released on bond.

WASHINGTON Port Orchard: Denise Cozzie and her husband Michael are the new parents of Meatball, the first dog who found her permanent home after being temporarily fostered by a group of volunteer veterans at the Washington Veterans Home in Port Orchard for some weeks.

WEST VIRGINIA Hurricane: Gov. Jim Justice announced that $25.9 million in funding has been approved by the West Virginia Water Development Authority for 17 projects, WV News reported.

WISCONSIN Madison: Wisconsin's population is estimated to shrink at a growing rate over the upcoming decades, according to a projection from the Wisconsin Department of Administration. According to the report, most counties will face a declining population by 2050. In total, it's a projected loss of nearly 200,000 people in the next three decades.

WYOMING Laramie: The University of Wyoming Department of Music has announced that it is now offering a new bachelor's degree program in music industry studies, Wyoming News Now reported.

From USA TODAY Network and wire reports

Take two: Varying opinions on the Giants' retention, 4C

One last WWE title? Just appreciate wrestler John Cena's farewell tour this year, **5C**

Latest news, results, opinions 24/7 at sports.usatoday.com

See who won and who lost last evening in the first match of the new TGL pro golf team league

Either James Franklin, top photo, or Marcus Freeman will be the first Black head coach to get a chance to win an FBS title. FRANKLIN BY MATTHEW O'HAREN/IMAGN IMAGES; FREEMAN BY MICHAEL CLUBB/SOUTH BEND TRIBUNE

Historic moment

Playoff semifinal ensures coaching final milestone

Mike Freeman
Columnist
USA TODAY

There's going to be a Black head coach playing for a national championship for the first time in Football Bowl Subdivision history. Some of you will read that sentence and roll your eyes because, well, you do you. But there is no denying this fact: This is a vital moment in sports history. In fact, it's one of the most important. • Either Notre Dame's Marcus Freeman or Penn State's James Franklin will make this history. In many ways it equals another unique moment. That was when the Super Bowl featured its first Black head coach. Actually, coaches ... plural. Super Bowl 41 in February 2007 had Tony Dungy and Lovie Smith. • Why would this moment in FBS history possibly equal or even surpass that one? It's because of how the NFL and college football have approached attempting to diversify its coaching ranks. • The NFL, for all of its flaws in this area (and there are many), has at least tried to rectify the issue using the Rooney Rule. The rule is far from perfect. But it has always been an acknowledgment of the problem. **See HISTORIC, Page 3C**

Cedric Golden
Austin American-Statesman
USA TODAY NETWORK

Texas' D seeks its groove again in semifinal

No offense in the game is hotter than Ohio State's.

That means it's all hands on deck for the suddenly mortal Texas defense. And those hands will be full come Friday's College Football Playoff semifinal at AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas.

If there's any defense in America capable of slowing down the vaunted Buckeyes' attack that destroyed Oregon in a 41-21 beatdown that was much worse than the score indicated, it's Texas'.

Let me amend that statement.

It would have to be the Texas that spent the regular season at or near the top in most of the major defensive statistical categories, not the leaky group that's been on its heels at times during this playoff.

To steal a line from our basketball friends, the 12-2 Buckeyes are making every 3-pointer they throw up and quarterback Will Howard has become Steph Curry.

We're not accustomed to seeing Texas' senior-laden unit give up so many chunk plays. Perhaps it's a testament to a step up in competition, but the numbers are startling nonetheless. Over these last couple of playoff games, one of the country's most impenetrable defenses has shown a vulnerability that's more concerning than a few extra yards after a missed tackle or two.

The 13-2 Horns have given up 12 plays of at least 20 yards over their past eight quarters. Want to know how many they allowed in the previous five before the CFP? Twelve, including just one against Georgia in the SEC championship game loss on running back Trevor Etienne's 48-yard run in the third quarter.

It's been a huge drop-off in performance. Even more disturbing was the Horns giving up five pass plays of at least 25 yards in the fourth quarter in the CFP, including Arizona State running back Cam Skattebo throwing a 42-yard halfback pass and hauling in a 62-yard catch over All-American safety Michael Taaffe to spur a furious

See GOLDEN, Page 3C

Arizona State running back Cam Skattebo and Texas safety Michael Taaffe battle in the CFP quarterfinal Fiesta Bowl. DALE ZANINE/IMAGN IMAGES

Chiefs and Lions lead pack on road to Super Bowl 59

Nate Davis
USA TODAY

The 2024 NFL postseason field is finally set.

It only took a year of planning and strategizing (in most clubs' cases anyway), and 272 regular-season games to settle the AFC's and NFC's playoff entries – all of them vying for a spot in Super Bowl 59, which will kick off at the Caesars Superdome in New Orleans on Feb. 9.

Which are best equipped to survive what will likely be a very difficult road to the "Big Easy"? We've ranked all 14 teams that still have a chance to play on Super Sunday, from worst to best, in terms of their championship viability.

14. Denver Broncos

Firstly, dap 'em up. Almost no one – me included – gave them even a remote shot to get this far with a rookie quarterback (Bo Nix), a lack of topflight offensive weaponry, an unproven defense or a salary cap crippled by the early release of Nix's predecessor, Russell Wilson, last March. Props, Sean Payton.

Now, let's be real – given, after all, cold reality is about to set in. The Chiefs effectively waved the Broncos, who failed to clinch a wild card in Weeks 16 and 17, into the postseason Sunday – because Kansas City and everyone else in the field would rather be potentially game-planning for the Broncos than Joe Burrow and the scalding Cincinnati Bengals, who would have qualified had Denver lost in Week 18. Regardless of who obtained the AFC's No. 7 seed, a Super Bowl trip was always going to be a tough assignment given the path, at minimum, would require wins at Buffalo and Arrowhead to even reach the conference title game.

Good work, Broncos, but your job – for this season anyway – is just about done.

13. Pittsburgh Steelers

The only teams on longer losing skids than Pittsburgh's four-game free fall are the Tennessee Titans and Cleveland Browns, aka the clubs slotted to choose first and second, respectively, atop the 2025 draft. Woof. The Steelers haven't only failed to win lately, they've generally been noncompetitive, losing those last four by an average of 13 points. The

See SUPER BOWL, Page 2C

Super Bowl

Continued from Page 1C

defense has largely been MIA over the past month, while Wilson has simultaneously resembled the quarterback who appeared washed in Denver – guilty of head-scratching turnovers and baffling clock management on top of a general inability to move the ball through the air with any regularity.

It's hardly an encouraging state of affairs for a franchise eight years removed from its most recent postseason victory. However ...

Recent struggles aside, Wilson has more than his share of playoff stripes, while veteran defenders such as T.J. Watt, Cam Heyward and Minkah Fitzpatrick won't shrink from what's ahead. And that would be the Ravens, whom the Steelers had beaten eight times in nine meetings ... prior to a 34-17 setback at M&T Bank Stadium on Dec. 21 anyway. Still, perhaps no other team has the ability to routinely render Baltimore star Lamar Jackson a mere mortal – and that capability alone should give Pittsburgh a Steel City brawler's chance ... of at least making the divisional round.

12. Houston Texans

A group that appeared to be on a steep ascent toward a championship level – something that H-Town hasn't enjoyed since the Oilers were an AFL powerhouse in the 1960s – has decidedly plateaued after what seemed a promising breakthrough in 2023. Offensive injuries and a too-often disjointed attack – one often undermined by a shaky line – have led to something of a regression by QB C.J. Stroud, last season's Offensive Rookie of the Year. The defense has been slightly more dependable overall yet has also surrendered at least 26 points in four of Houston's past eight games.

The home game conferred by the AFC South crown could help, as might a wild-card matchup against a Chargers team that also doesn't have much collective experience in these situations. But hard to envisage a best-case scenario for the Texans beyond a second consecutive trip to the divisional round.

11. Washington Commanders

No shade directed at QB Jayden Daniels. At all. None. But there have been 116 starts by quarterbacks in the Super Bowl ... but not one has been by a rookie.

Perhaps Daniels can be the one to break that mold. It's very easy to build a case that his NFL debut is the best a first-year quarterback has ever had. He's the primary reason a franchise that's been lost in the wilderness for most of the past three decades suddenly finds itself elevated to relevance in what seems like a meaningful and sustainable manner. But let's not saddle Daniels, Washington's leading rusher in 2024, with the Jackson comp. Sure, the 2023 Heisman Trophy winner is just about the next-best-thing already and will doubtless carve his own identity – and that may well involve being a better and more dangerous passer than young Jackson much earlier on Daniels' NFL arc.

Also, it's not fair to characterize the Commanders as a one-man band. WR Terry McLaurin is a Pro Bowler, and first-year head coach Dan Quinn has had a huge hand in resetting the culture while getting the most out of a defense that has few recognizable names outside of future Hall of Fame LB Bobby Wagner.

Still, history is an important guidepost. Washington likely has enough firepower to notch a postseason win. But the Bucs are a very tough matchup out of the chute. And the rookie passers who have historically had the most success in the playoffs – think Joe Flacco, Mark Sanchez, Russell Wilson or Ben Roethlisberger – have essentially had complete teams around them, ones that weren't necessarily reliant on a green quarterback. Washington isn't that kind of outfit, so a very high bar for Daniels and offensive coordinator Kliff Kingsbury – he's never experienced a postseason victory in his five seasons on NFL coaching staffs – to clear immediately.

10. Los Angeles Chargers

Who's got it better than them? Maybe "future us" first-year boss Jim Harbaugh admitted after guiding a team into the postseason for the fourth time in his five seasons as an NFL head coach. And the Bolts have many of the attributes that can portend playoff success – toughness, discipline, capability to run the ball, plus a quarterback (Justin Herbert) who can easily take over a game yet will rarely lose one.

Clearly a team on the rise, the Chargers seem ahead of schedule in Year 1 under Harbaugh as they take aim at the franchise's first Lombardi Trophy. And opening at Houston seems like as favorable a matchup as they could hope for. Still, Harbaugh's team has yet to prove it can consistently compete with the league's elite, and it certainly doesn't seem to possess the explosiveness to stick around if a generally stingy defense fails to contain some of the league's more combustible offenses, particularly on the road.

Bucs running back Bucky Irving celebrates a TD. NATHAN RAY SEEBECK/IMAGN IMAGES

9. Green Bay Packers

Be nice to see a bit more appreciation for my NFC Super Bowl pick in the preseason. Few 11-win teams are able to fly under the radar like this group, which has few weaknesses, one of the league's top coaches in Matt LaFleur (probably also underrated) and nearly reached the NFC championship game last season, QB Jordan Love's first as leader of the Pack.

Though there won't be any more games at Lambeau Field this season, don't expect the NFC's seventh seed to shy away from being road warriors given their success there in the 2023 playoffs. (And, for what it's worth, the last time the Packers won the Super Bowl to cap the 2010 season, they did it as the conference's lowest-seeded entry.)

But there are major drawbacks this time – namely having to win at Philadelphia and then Detroit to merely make the NFC title round. And a team that was swept by the Lions and Vikings this season and also lost to the Eagles hasn't exactly proved it's able to hang with heavyweights. Love, who had to leave Sunday's loss to the Chicago Bears after banging his throwing elbow, and the Packers also aren't carrying the same load of momentum that propelled them into January a year ago. And Green Bay's outlook certainly won't be improved now that WR Christian Watson and CB Jaire Alexander have been lost to knee injuries.

8. Minnesota Vikings

It's been a great season. Great. Unexpected. Perhaps a major building block toward the Lombardi Trophy that has forever eluded this franchise.

But is a letdown already setting in? To win 14 games but have to start the playoffs on the road as a wild card is literally unheard of – and the Vikes must return to Los Angeles' SoFi Stadium, where they've already lost to the Rams once this season. Also, Minnesota's protagonists have much to prove. Head coach Kevin O'Connell is a brilliant, rising star who coaxed 13 wins out of his 2022 edition ... which summarily lost to an average New York Giants team in the wild-card round. Quarterback Sam Darnold has been a revelation in 2024, but he's also never started in the playoffs and had one of his worst games of the season Sunday night, when the NFC's No. 1 seed was within grasp.

The Vikings are explosive, opportunistic – particularly an unrelenting defense tied for the league lead with 33 turnovers generated – and have one of the NFL's truly unique and lethal weapons in WR Justin Jefferson. Yet it's hard to drum up too much confidence that those elements can underpin an extended playoff run, particularly coming off a deflating performance at Detroit when so much was at stake.

7. Los Angeles Rams

The NFC West champions are largely rested, fairly young and fresh – particularly a blossoming defense – yet experienced in key spots, specifically head coach Sean McVay, QB Matthew Stafford and WR Cooper Kupp, the Super Bowl 56 MVP.

After employing O'Connell as his offensive coordinator for two years, we're going to give an edge to McVay in the wild-card coaching matchup given the insights he'll have into his protégé – even though both men will doubtless be considering ways to break tendencies. But McVay's 7-4 postseason record and pair of Super Bowl trips are tough to ignore. His team is also flush with playmakers – keep an eye on rookie Pro Bowl OLB Jared Verse – and, despite suffering its share of injuries over the course of the season, has steadily gotten guys back, including the inspirational return of TE Tyler Higbee from a gruesome knee injury suffered in last year's playoff loss.

But keep an eye on Stafford. The 36-year-old had a fairly quiet season by his standards and really seemed to tail off in December – throwing one TD pass over his final three starts, while failing to pass for 200 yards or post a QB rating of even 85.0 in any of them.

6. Tampa Bay Buccaneers

You'd think a team that won the Super Bowl four years ago – albeit with Tom Brady but also several players who are still here – and has won the NFC South every season since, the last two with QB Baker Mayfield, would get a little more respect. You'd think a team that handed Detroit one of its two losses this season and nearly beat the Lions in Motown during last year's divisional playoff round would get a little more respect. You'd think a team that has been among the league's most dominant over the final third of the season would get a little more respect.

Alas.

That's not to say anybody should bet the mortgage on the Bucs winning it all. Though they can score with anybody, the defense is about as underwhelming as it's been since head coach Todd Bowles came to town. And injuries have deprived them of key players like WR Chris Godwin and, just over the weekend, S Jordan Whitehead, who was hurt in a car accident – his absence just the latest blow to an already banged-up secondary.

Still, there's a fearlessness to this team – which stems largely from Mayfield's persona – and little reason to believe a Krewe that was nearly in the NFL's final four last season isn't capable of making another significant championship push.

5. Buffalo Bills

Aside from its inherent benefits, how important was the No. 1 seed in the AFC? Consider that the Bills were one of two teams in the league that didn't lose at home this season ... the other being the Chiefs, who edged out Buffalo for home-field advantage. Still, if all goes as planned, the Bills will be at Highmark Stadium for at least the next two weekends before hitting the road for Arrowhead or – perhaps – hosting the AFC championship game if K.C. somehow flames out.

The perennial AFC East champs will be a very tough out, the squad's "everybody eats" philosophy indicative that a threat could come from anywhere, even if MVP candidate Josh Allen and RB James Cook are the primary offensive threats. They can beat you in a variety of ways, the first team in league history to post at least 30 rushing *and* 30 receiving touchdowns. Buffalo also led the league in turnover differential (plus-24) by a wide margin – that included 32 takeaways, third in the league – which tells you the Bills are more than content to embarrass you but unlikely to compromise themselves.

Still, aside from a checkered playoff history (recent and distant), this team is hardly bulletproof. Can anyone really adequately pick up the slack if Allen has a bad day? Will a defense that allowed two forty-burgers in the past five weeks hold? Maybe and hopefully if you're a Bills Mafia member.

4. Philadelphia Eagles

Granted, retired C Jason Kelce is gone (from the lineup anyway), and transcendent RB Saquon Barkley is present for duty. Otherwise, there are ample similarities between the 2024 Eagles and 2022 Eagles, who came up just short of winning Super Bowl 57. Philadelphia can be dominant on offense and/or stifling on defense, coordinator Vic Fangio's unit ranked No. 1 overall by a sizable margin after surrendering fewer than 280 yards, on average, per week.

Unsurprisingly, after finally being plugged into an offense worthy of his copious talents and propelled by perhaps the league's best line, Barkley has been more than a difference-maker here. His mere presence creates easier and increased opportunities for WRs A.J. Brown and DeVonta Smith and TE Dallas Goedert, who rejoined the lineup Sunday.

However, also like 2022, QB Jalen Hurts has battled injury down the stretch, sidelined by a concussion since Dec. 22. He's quietly crafted his most efficient season as a pro, and early indications are that he'll be ready to play this Sunday when the Packers come to Lincoln Financial Field. But the rust factor could be an issue, and there will likely always be concerns about Hurts' ability to pass his team back into a game if it falls into a sizable deficit that reduces the Barkley threat – and that's not a far-fetched problem in a field that includes the Lions and Buccaneers, who have no problem posting 40 points, while Green Bay and Minnesota are also certainly capable of running up the score quickly.

3. Baltimore Ravens

Is anyone playing better? They've won four straight, by an average of 23 points, since a Week 14 bye. Good luck finding an offense that has more ways to beat you – even if Pro Bowl WR Zay Flowers (knee) misses time. After being the team's early season Achilles', the defense has jelled – allowing fewer than 11 points and 250 yards over the past month while forcing six turnovers (including two pick-sixes). Even struggling K Justin Tucker has stabilized.

Oh yeah, Jackson is probably the best football player on the planet.

But before going all in on the Ravens, one must consider their recent postseason flops. They're 2-5 in the playoffs since Jackson came aboard in 2018 – he missed one of those losses – and he's decidedly not been the same player when the chips are on the table. The AFC North champs will likely have to win road games at Buffalo and Kansas City in order to reach the Super Bowl. And to do that, they'd be wise not to lose sight of their identity – looking at you, offensive coordinator Todd Monken – and that means running the ball, whether by feeding RB Derrick Henry or some designed gallops for Jackson, who can loosen up a defense like no other. Also, Ravens supporters can't be thrilled to see the Kryptonite Steelers, much as they've scuffled lately, as the opening assignment Saturday.

2. Detroit Lions

Their rash of injuries is a clear and present concern, and they continued to mount in Sunday night's clinching effort for the NFC's No. 1 seed – rookie CB Terrion Arnold (foot) and G Kevin Zeitler the latest starters to be cast in doubt.

But there have already been signs of the cavalry, LB Alex Anzalone and PR/WR Kalif Raymond returning to the lineup in Week 18. And the possibility remains that DE Aidan Hutchinson might be able to return for the Super Bowl after breaking his leg three months ago, while

Continued on next page

Golden

Continued from Page 1C

comeback that nearly ended Texas' season had it not been for the heroics of quarterback Quinn Ewers and pass catchers Matthew Golden and Gunnar Helm.

I didn't even mention Arizona State quarterback Sam Leavitt's desperation overtime scramble to the goal line on third-and-14, which is the type of play the Horns just haven't given up at money time in an otherwise banner season.

Now, this all comes with the understanding that the overtime scare would not have happened had embattled kicker Bert Auburn made that 38-yard field goal on the last play of the fourth quarter. Still, breakdowns happened long before he clanked that goalpost.

Also, the offense that has consistently closed out games and preserved leads down the stretch with a dependable rushing attack couldn't move the chains and played a role in the Sun Devils erasing a 24-8 deficit in a span of 91 seconds.

Taaffe is a locker room leader who also happens to be his own worst critic. He's stressing accountability entering Friday's showdown as evidenced by him telling his teammates "That's on me" after giving up the Skattebo catch.

"If you're preaching it, you've got to do it also," Taaffe said. "But I think there are just so many situations that happened in that game. The football gods ... if there are any, they were on Arizona State's side for all that second half, and it just seemed like nothing could go our way. And that happens in football.

"But the end of the day, we came out with the 'W,' and no matter what it took, we were willing to do it."

They survived the upset bid but know they have to be several levels above what they have shown lately to topple the Buckeyes, who are a massive favorite, according to head coach Steve Sarkisian.

"I think we've got to be really good at the line of scrimmage against the run and the pass," Sarkisian said. "Ohio State is similar to us that way. When they have balance, they're very difficult. We have to stop the run. We have to affect (quarterback Will Howard) in the pocket and we need to disrupt timing in the back end."

The Longhorns have not been an elite defense of late. They have allowed 922 yards in the past two games, including consecutive season highs of 412 and 510 yards to Clemson and Arizona State, respectively.

After ranking atop the national rankings in pass defense for much of the season, Texas has given up 25 first downs by pass in the Playoff, making Clemson (15) and Arizona State (10) the first two opponents to crack double digits in the category this season.

Texas cornerback Jahdae Barron celebrates a turnover against Clemson in the first-round College Football Playoff win on Dec. 21. Barron won this season's Thorpe Award as the nation's top defensive back. RICARDO B. BRAZZIELL/AMERICAN-STATESMAN

To his credit, defensive coordinator Pete Kwiatkowski has authored one of the greatest improvements in one season in program history – Texas went from 116th in pass defense in 2023 to No. 1 this season – but no amount of back slaps and atta-boys will be enough if the Horns continue to be more name than game in the program's biggest game in 15 seasons.

When Arizona State scored 16 unanswered points to force overtime and another seven to open the extra frame, it represented the first time the Horns gave up a scoring streak that big since Georgia took a 23-0 halftime lead at Royal-Memorial Stadium, which was Texas' only regular-season loss.

Aside from showing up at Jerry World dressed in maize and blue uniforms, how can the Horns put a scare into an Ohio State offense that's putting up 41.5 points and 486.5 yards in the postseason?

"It's not so much the opponent," said cornerback Jahdae Barron. "It's just being in there and us paying attention and being dialed in and very detailed to PK's plan and what he has for us, and just executing it at the highest level we can, which we know how to do and which we're capable of doing."

Howard has been on some kind of heater lately. He has topped 300 yards passing in consecutive games for the first time in a 46-game career dating back to the four years he spent at Kansas State. For those who left the planet over the last four seasons, Howard went 0-3 against the Longhorns while in the Little Apple. But he now has weapons for days in Jeremiah Smith, a 6-foot-3, 215-pound freshman wideout who resembles a young Roy Williams, along with Smith's receiving mate Emeka Egbuka and a great 1-2 punch at running back in TreVeyon Henderson and Quinshon Judkins.

It's easily the most talented offense Texas will have played, but the Buckeyes aren't invincible on that side of the ball. The Wolverines held them to 10 points and 252 yards on a cold but sunny day at the Horseshoe on Nov. 30. Sure, it was a rivalry game, but the Michigan defense isn't nearly as talented as Texas'. We saw it firsthand in the Longhorns' 31-12 win at the Big House in Week 2.

Teams do evolve over a season, and Ohio State is clearly improved on offense. That said, Texas hasn't forgotten how to play defense.

A Texas win over the Buckeyes is entirely possible – we learned as much from Vince Young and Limas Sweed in 2005 and Colt McCoy and Quan Cosby in 2008 – but it's well past time for the Longhorns to get their defensive groove back. History beckons, but before they can start thinking about playing for a national championship, they have to get back to playing Texas Longhorn defense.

CFP semi: Cotton Bowl

No. 5 Texas (13-2) vs.
No. 8 Ohio State (12-2)

7:30 p.m. ET Friday,
AT&T Stadium
in Arlington, Texas

Historic

Continued from Page 1C

College football, conversely, has been woefully inadequate in trying to diversify its head coaching ranks. The college game, in many ways, has been historically hostile to Black coaches (especially in the South). The NFL is slightly better. (Emphasis on slightly.) But it's better.

The NCAA doesn't have the strength or political will to ever create the college equivalent of the Rooney Rule so it's the racial Wild West in college football.

Meaning, overall, if you look at the history of the sport, it has been more difficult for a Black head coach to reach this point than it has been in the NFL. Or especially college basketball.

It's true that it was only a matter of time before this happened in colleges. It's just remarkable it took this long. The year is 2025. We were supposed to have flying cars and Black head coaches in the championship game long ago.

Why should this moment be acknowledged and celebrated? Let the first Black head football coach in Notre Dame history, Tyrone Willingham, explain.

"Because it's never happened before," Willingham told Andscape. "It's a first, and we should celebrate all firsts as long as they're positive. It's an accomplishment for us as African Americans, especially if you know anything about history. When I started coaching, there may have been one African American coach on a staff.

"Notice I said, 'May have been.' "

The interesting part of this story is that college basketball passed this marker decades ago. It was 1984 when John Thompson won a national championship with Georgetown. That was *41 years ago.* Other Black coaches would follow in Thompson's footsteps and win championships.

"I might have been the first Black person who was provided with an opportunity to compete for this prize, that you have discriminated against thousands of my ancestors to deny them this opportunity," Thompson once said. "So, I felt obligated to define that, and I got a little criticism for saying it"

(I also state all of this with great humility. My business, the journalism business, has not been historically great at diversifying its own workforce. We don't have a Rooney Rule. We definitely need one.)

This moment with Franklin and Freeman (no relation) is vital because it can create a future permission structure for ADs. We shouldn't need those permission structures. But we do. Franklin remembers how the Dungy and Smith Super Bowl, for example, likely opened doors for coaches like him to later walk through.

"I remember thinking that as a coach, how significant that was in the profession and how significant that was for young coaches coming up in the profession to see those guys in that role," Franklin said. "I also remember at that time that there was a lot of conversations about will this impact the profession. Will this impact have earned opportunities for guys?"

Freeman, during a recent news conference, noted that while his father is Black, his mother is South Korean. That makes Freeman the first head coach of Asian descent in the CFP.

"I'm going to work tirelessly to be the best version of me," he said, "and it's great, because even the guys in our program can understand, 'Don't put a ceiling on what you can be and what you can do.' "

This is a huge moment. One of the biggest we've ever seen in college football. It's about time.

CFP semi: Orange Bowl

No. 6 seed Penn State vs.
No. 7 Notre Dame, 7:30 ET Thurs.

Continued from previous page

RB David Montgomery has held out hope he can come back from an MCL injury.

Yet all the focus on injuries here also detracts from what this team has accomplished – like winning a club-record 15 games while posting 70 TDs (only three teams in NFL history have produced more in the regular season). QB Jared Goff, one of the offense's five Pro Bowlers, is a proven playoff commodity. And Detroit's prospects for going all the way – the Lions are the only team that has played for the entirety of the Super Bowl era, which started in 1966, but never reached Super Sunday – are greatly enhanced by that first-round bye and the knowledge that the next two games would be at Ford Field, which has developed into one of the league's best home-field advantages.

All that aside, there's an undeniable aura to this team – one cultivated by coach Dan Campbell and his seeming devil-may-care persona, though don't miss his calculated approach to game-planning or the confidence and "grit" he's imbued into the best Lions team its fans have seen in nearly seven decades.

It must be noted that defense does often win championships. And the three teams that scored more TDs than Detroit (2007 New England Patriots, 2013 Broncos, 2018 Chiefs) all came up short. Yet Sunday's victory against Minnesota provided fresh evidence that, despite so many absent starters, coordinator Aaron Glenn's unit can rise to the occasion.

These Lions might finally be ready to be kings of the NFL jungle.

1. Kansas City Chiefs

Admittedly, as far as 15-2 regular seasons go, it wasn't overly impressive. The Chiefs didn't even rank in the top 10 leaguewide in point differential (+59) – and would've only barely made it had they not punted entirely on their 38-0 loss Sunday to Denver.

They're quite strong up the middle on both sides of the ball but, with the exception of CB Trent McDuffie, there are a fair amount of issues on the outside – whether it's protecting QB Patrick Mahomes, generating pressure, pass coverage or even consistency from the receivers.

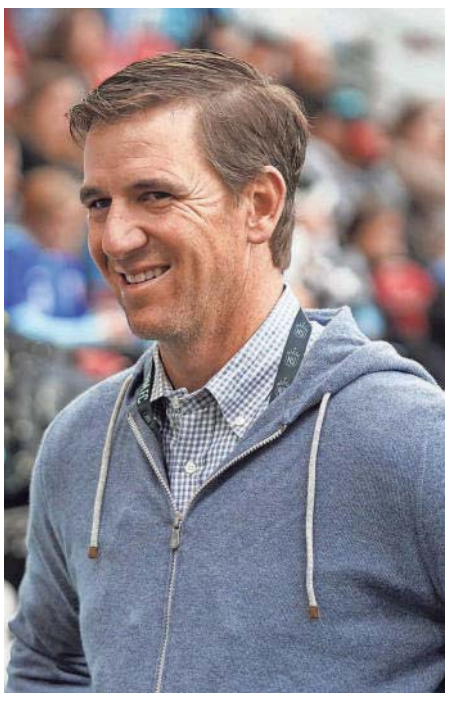
But let's not give a team that's won three of the previous five Super Bowls (and lost another) short shrift. Remember, it was doom and gloom last year following their Christmas loss to the Las Vegas Raiders at Arrowhead. Yet Andy Reid, Mahomes and Co. found a way to close the season on a six-game heater – the average margin of victory was 6.8 points, sufficient to hoist the franchise's latest Lombardi Trophy.

The defense remains top notch if perhaps not quite as good as the 2023 version. Kansas City, already in the midst of what's effectively a two-week rest period for the primary players, is already relatively healthy. And when you're talking about Super Bowl viability – once again, few things are more important than having to win one fewer game than your competitors ... while staying at home to do so.

But maybe nothing is more notable here than a championship core's motivation to pull off the first-ever Super Bowl three-peat, which Mahomes – he's never failed to lead Kansas City to the AFC championship game since becoming the QB1 in 2018 – Travis Kelce and Chris Jones have been fixated on for nearly a year. Legacy and history are unparalleled motivators for the great ones.

Eli Manning thinks teams should factor continuity in decision

Tom Schad
USA TODAY



Eli Manning applauded the Giants' decision to retain their coach and GM because 'you've got to have that continuity.' LUCAS BOLAND/IMAGN IMAGES

New York Giants ownership raised a few eyebrows Monday morning with their decision to retain head coach Brian Daboll and general manager Joe Schoen after a dismal 3-14 season.

But in an interview with USA TODAY Sports a few hours after the team's announcement, former Giants quarterback Eli Manning applauded the move as "the right decision."

"You've got to have that continuity," Manning said in an interview to promote Verizon's Super Bowl FanFest. "To change things up has not worked. It has not worked for the Giants these last 10 years of changing every two or three years.

"I think Brian Daboll has showed that he has won, two years ago in the playoffs. So I think the opportunity for them to go in, they've got to figure out the quarterback situation this year, but they have talent. They have guys around that are playing at a high level. It's just building that great team culture.

"That just takes time, and I think it's the right move to give him that time to do that."

Manning, the 2004 No. 1 overall draft pick by the Chargers who was traded to the Giants, spent the entirety of his 16-year career in New York before retiring after the 2019 season. In his 12 seasons playing for head coach Tom Coughlin, the Giants won two Super Bowl titles and recorded an overall record of 102-90. In the nine seasons since, they've cycled through four full-time head coaches and gone 51-96-1.

Perhaps that's why Manning, 44, is such a fan of NFL franchises seeking continuity – and why he was disappointed by some of the week's other big coaching moves, including the New England Patriots' firing of Jerod Mayo after one season.

"Just giving a coach one year to try to change things up in New England with Mayo is tough," Manning said. "Coming off a bad year, you have a brand-new quarterback that you take early that's getting playing time and then you come in and change. One year, it's hard to, again, create that culture, get the draft picks, develop players, get everybody going and playing the way you want it played.

"I always kind of have the players' and the coaches' back on this, because none of it is usually deserving. But that's just the business we're in. Organizations, owners they want winning teams very quickly and right now."

Manning spoke to USA TODAY Sports and other media outlets to promote the first-ever FanFest, which will allow fans in the 30 cities with NFL teams to celebrate Super Bowl Sunday from their home team's stadium. The local events will feature local musicians, food from local restaurants and meet-and-greet opportunity with retired NFL stars like Tiki Barber, Derrick Brooks and Marshall Faulk.

"I think it's just an awesome experience for fans … just the opportunity for fans to go to the stadium, go on the fields and watch the Super Bowl, be in an iconic local venue," Manning said. "Obviously this is a giant Super Bowl party across the country, but it's also very local."

Manning said he will be in New Orleans during the week of the Super Bowl – which is when he will also learn whether he has been inducted to the Hall of Fame. (The Hall of Fame class will be announced Feb. 6, before the Super Bowl on Feb. 9.)

Manning is one of 15 modern-era finalists for the Hall and figures to be one of the most hotly-debated candidates for this year's class. A four-time Pro Bowl honoree and two-time Super Bowl MVP, he ranks 11th all time in touchdown passes thrown but also 12th in career interceptions.

When asked about the so-called hot takes surrounding his Hall of Fame resume, Manning demurred.

"I consider an honor just to be included," he said.

"It's one of those deals where I can't control it anymore. It's out of my hands. I can't throw any more touchdowns, I can't throw any more interceptions, I can't have good plays or get any more wins or losses.

"The information's out there, the stats are out there, and all I can do is sit and wait."

Winslow II loses bid to have prison term reduced

Brent Schrotenboer
USA TODAY

SAN DIEGO – Former Cleveland Browns tight end Kellen Winslow II has been denied again in his attempt to have his 14-year prison sentence reduced under new criminal justice reform laws.

Winslow

The California Court of Appeal this time rejected his habeas corpus petition and said that Winslow's claims are procedurally barred because he could have raised his claims on direct appeal several years ago but did not.

"A defendant cannot raise claims via a habeas corpus writ petition that could have been raised on direct appeal," said the order denying Winslow's petition.

Winslow, 41, was sentenced to 14 years in prison in March 2021 after being convicted of sex crimes against five women in San Diego County, including the rape of a woman who was unconscious in 2003 and the rape of a homeless woman in 2018. The 2004 NFL first-round draft pick agreed to the sentence in a plea deal but since has sought to be resentenced under criminal justice reform laws that passed after his sentencing in 2021.

His petition cited AB 124, a state law intended to help criminal defendants who previously experienced "psychological, physical, or childhood trauma." AB 124 requires the court to impose a lower term of sentencing if the defendant has experienced such trauma, unless there are aggravating circumstances.

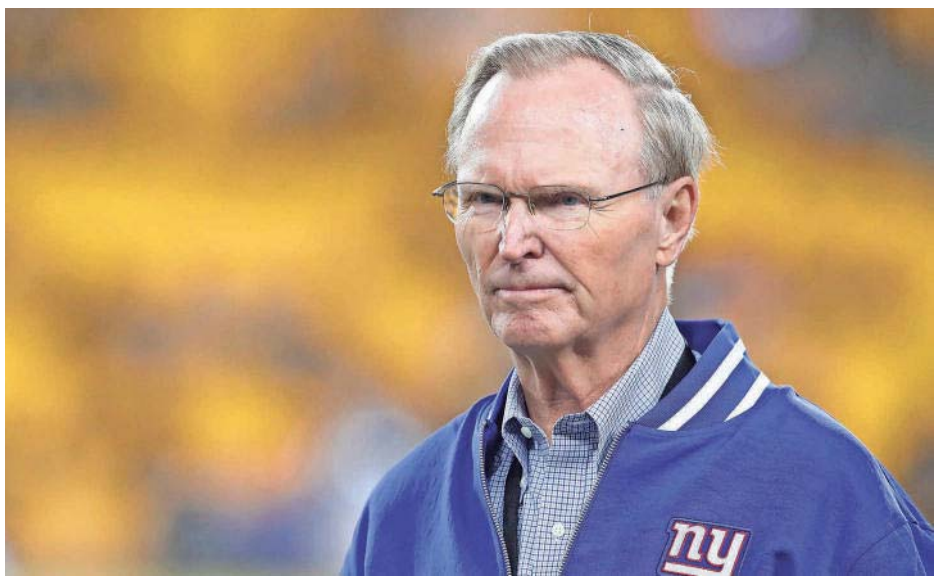
In Winslow's case, he cited brain injuries from football and sexual abuse he experienced in childhood.

Winslow sought a two-year reduction of his sentence "consistent with the new laws that have become effective since he went to prison," according to a filing from Winslow's attorney in November.

"Petitioner (Winslow) is not seeking to avoid punishment, but rather seeks a hearing to determine the impact of his brain injuries on the decision-making that led to the crimes he committed," the filing stated. "The Legislature suggested that those who had suffered trauma and abuse as a child (sexual abuse in this case) may be less culpable than those convicted of the same offenses who were never burdened by such problems."

Winslow's petition was considered by Justices Martin Buchanan, Julia Kelety and Jose Castillo, who issued their denial on Jan. 2.

Winslow currently is serving time in Norco, California, and is not eligible for parole until September 2028, according to state records.



Co-owner John Mara's Giants have had two winning seasons since 2015. CHARLES LECLAIRE/IMAGN IMAGES

Giants' explanation for keeping coach, GM is affront to fans

Chris Bumbaca
USA TODAY

The only thing more embarrassing than the New York Giants' 100th season was John Mara's explanation the day after it ended.

Hours after releasing a statement that head coach Brian Daboll and general manager Joe Schoen would return for the 2025 season, the Giants co-owner essentially constructed the plank the two will walk next season should things not turn around.

"It better not take too long (to improve the product)," Mara told reporters Monday, "because I've just about run of patience."

Everyone else is already there, John.

Letting Schoen and Daboll return is defensible, given the proper messaging and rationale. Except instead of offering a rebuttal, Mara essentially prefaced why he would have to fire them next season should the winning ways not return. It's exactly the type of dysfunction that has plagued the franchise for the better part of a decade and portends to do so for the future.

"I understand, believe me, that that's not going to be the most popular decision in Giants land, but we believe it's the right decision for us going forward," Mara said.

Schoen and Daboll are 18-32-1 with one playoff appearance and a playoff win in that first season. Daboll was named NFL Coach of the Year for his efforts in 2022, when the team started 7-2, largely thanks to a defense that performed better than expectations. But that season's defensive coordinator, Wink Martindale, and Daboll couldn't get along, and now Martindale is at the University of Michigan.

Since that start, the Giants are 12-31-1 (including the playoffs). Desiring continuity is admirable, but regression – to this degree – should be unacceptable. But Mara's poor choices (hiring Dave Gettleman as GM, then Pat Shurmur and Joe Judge as head coach) have created a revolving door in northern New Jersey, and only now has Mara sought to stop it.

"When you start over, you really set yourselves back," Mara said. "And when you have a belief in the two individuals that are leading the organization, you have to have the patience to stay with it. And again, if we're standing here, if I'm standing here a year from now and we're having the same conversation, I'll take the heat for it. But I still think – we still believe – that it's the right decision going forward."

This was the same media session in which he said his patience was thinning. Two songs, one singer. And a nightmare for the fans.

Sure, Daboll has had a tough hand with Daniel Jones at quarterback, and his injuries and poor play led to Tommy DeVito, Drew Lock and Tyrod Taylor all stepping into the starting role over the course of the past two seasons. But the offense has never been explosive outside of two late-season victories against the even more directionless Indianapolis Colts in the 2022 (38 points) and 2024 seasons (45 points), respectively.

Mara didn't blame anyone else for the Giants' shortcomings. But he sure did talk himself in a circle. He should take notes from New England Patriots owner Robert Kraft, a guy who knows a thing or two about winning (recent results aside).

"This whole situation is on me," Kraft said while addressing the media Monday, a day after the Patriots moved on from Jerod Mayo after one season. "I feel terrible for Jerod because I put him in an untenable situation. I know he has all the tools as a head coach to be successful in this league. He just needed more time before taking the job. In the end, I'm a fan of this team first. And now, I have to go out and find a coach who can get us back to the playoffs and hopefully championships."

There's a level of introspection, humility and confidence there that Mara would do well to emulate.

Mara has his own ideas of what he'd like to see fixed this upcoming offseason. Here's a brief recap of what he said:

- He was disgusted by the defense and basically put the blame on coordinator Shane Bowen.
- Daboll should give up offensive play calling (though the coach later said that he brought it up in their meeting).
- He wouldn't say whether the roster Schoen inherited from Gettleman is better than the one they ended this season with.
- The Giants definitely didn't tank against the Philadelphia Eagles' backups, with Tanner McKee at quarterback, after playing themselves out of the No. 1 pick a week prior.
- Schoen and Daboll remain the right people for their jobs.

Schoen's first two draft picks, Kayvon Thibodeaux and Evan Neal, have been underwhelming at best and disasters at worst, considering they were the No. 5 and No. 7 overall picks, respectively, in 2022. But Mara liked the 2024 draft class, which included Malik Nabers at No. 6 and running back Tyrone Tracy Jr. in the fifth round (second-round safety Tyler Nubin also looked promising).

Schoen said Monday he respects ownership too much to be reckless with money this offseason. But with the heat turned up, expect a free agency spending spree on players who will not live up to their contracts, as has become a Giants tradition at this point, and handicap the future regime – just like Gettleman did to Schoen before the former was graciously given the chance to retire instead of Mara having the stomach to fire him.

Rinse. Repeat. Give out free sodas during the last game of the season as an "Oops, our bad!"

Here's that word again: dysfunction.

Maybe Mara is so forward-thinking that another year of futility will finally yield a quarterback of the future in a 2026 draft class that figures to have better prospects at the position. Anybody could tell you the Giants were desperate for a passer. The owner saying it out loud makes the price to acquire one – through free agency, the draft or a trade – that much steeper.

In a division that changes hands every year, the Giants haven't won the NFC East since the 2011 season. The sad realization is that the franchise has largely been a joke since. That changing anytime soon feels impossible with Mara at the top of the organization, and co-owner Steve Tisch – who owns 50% of the team but leaves the football side to the Maras – seems content enough to collect checks and keep his own family name lucrative and relevant.

Over the past 10 seasons, the Giants are 57-106-1. The New York Jets, the team the Giants share a stadium with but act like they're better than, have one fewer win over that span. Only the Jacksonville Jaguars have won less often.

That is the company John Mara has chosen to keep. Unless he changes his ways – or, really, gets out of the way – the Giants will remain in the NFL's basement.

49ers receiver Ricky Pearsall carries the ball past DJ Reader of the Lions during their Week 17 game on Dec. 30. THEARON W. HENDERSON/GETTY IMAGES

49ers WR forgives teen who shot him in robbery attempt

Ayrton Ostly
USA TODAY

San Francisco 49ers rookie wide receiver Ricky Pearsall missed the first six games of the 2024 NFL season after being shot in the chest in an attempted robbery in August.

He was released from the hospital two days later and made a full recovery. He made his NFL debut in Week 7 against the Kansas City Chiefs and finished his rookie campaign with six catches for 69 yards and a touchdown in the 49ers' 47-24 loss to Arizona in Week 18.

After the game, Pearsall spoke about his season and forgiving the teenager who shot him in the attempted robbery.

"I don't know how he grew up so, I can't judge him as a man just based off one action that he made," Pearsall said Sunday. "As violent as a crime as it was, God forbid him doing that to somebody else. I don't ever want that to happen."

"For me, just being able to forgive him at the end of the day like, I have to be able to forgive him to have that weight off my chest," Pearsall continued. "At some point I do want to talk to the kid and make sure that, if I can create an impact on him in any way, I think that would be really big. I think I'd be definitely open to doing that, for sure."

The suspect in the shooting, identified as a 17-year-old from Tracy, California, was charged with attempted murder and two other felonies.

Here's a full recap of what happened to Pearsall and his recovery:

- Aug. 31, 2024: Pearsall is shot in the chest in an attempted robbery while walking in the Union Square area of San Francisco on his way to an autograph signing event. The 17-year-old shooter was allegedly attempting to steal Pearsall's watch, and both were shot in the incident.
- Sept. 1: Pearsall is released from San Francisco General Hospital.
- Sept. 2: San Francisco places Pearsall on the reserve/non-football injury list.
- Sept. 9: Pearsall was on the sideline for the 49ers' opening game against the New York Jets. During the game, the first responders who helped Pearsall at the scene of the robbery were honored.
- Oct. 19: The 49ers upgrade Pearsall from the reserve/NFI list to the active roster.
- Oct. 20: Pearsall makes his NFL debut against the Chiefs. He has three catches for 21 yards on five targets and receives an ovation from the home crowd after his first career reception.

With wideout Brandon Aiyuk sidelined with a season-ending injury, Pearsall took on an increased role in the offense.

Pearsall finished the season with 31 catches for 400 yards and three touchdowns. He was fourth on the team in catches and yards behind George Kittle, Jauan Jennings and Deebo Samuel.

He also had three carries for 45 rushing yards.

Jerry Jones makes heartfelt 'Landman' cameo appearance

Jacob Camenker
USA TODAY

Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones is shown before the game against the Washington Commanders at AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas, on Sunday. KEVIN JAIRAJ/IMAGN IMAGES

Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones is often in the spotlight running the NFL's most lucrative franchise, but he is receiving a different type of attention early in 2025.

It has nothing to do with the future of Cowboys head coach Mike McCarthy. It's all about Jones' acting chops.

Jones had a surprise cameo on the popular TV series "Landman," which follows a cast of characters chasing an oil boom in west Texas.

The 82-year-old, who made his first million in the oil industry, earned praise for his appearance across from distinguished actors Jon Hamm and Billy Bob Thornton.

Jones' "Landman" cameo occurred in the ninth episode of the Paramount+ drama's first season, which was released on Sunday.

The Cowboys owner visited Hamm's character, Monty Miller, in the hospital after Miller suffers a heart attack.

Jones delivered a speech that outlined to Miller and Tommy Norris (Thornton's character) how important family is in one's life. It detailed the joy he experienced working alongside his kids with the franchise.

"Now I'm not saying I've done anything right, but I made my mind up a long time ago I was gonna work with my kids," Jones said in the scene.

"And they're involved in everything. They're involved in my leasing, oil and gas, real estate.

"And so, when I got the Cowboys, I got it so that we could all work together. I thought I was doing it for them, but the one that got the most out of it was me."

The scene required Jones to get emotional, and he was successful in doing so. He appeared to have tears in his eyes by the end of his brief appearance and delivered an impactful line that seemed to land with Hamm's and Thornton's characters.

"I'm pretty proud of them Cowboys, I'm pretty proud of the stuff we've done in oil and gas," Jones said. "It pales in comparison to how proud I am to have lived my life working with my kids."

Jones earned plenty of praise for his appearance in the episode, with many noting the authenticity of his monologue.

Some even believed that Jones' dialogue was unscripted, and that he was speaking from the heart.

Jerry Jones' acting career

"Landman" was not Jones' first cameo appearance during his career. Here is a full list of the programs on which he has appeared as himself:

- Coach (1996)
- Arli$$ (1996-2000)
- Entourage (2010)
- Cubed (2011)
- The League (2012)
- Landman (2025)

How did Jerry Jones make his money?

Jones made his first $1 million as a wildcatter in the oil industry during the 1970s, according to Forbes.

He has continued to invest in drilling opportunities, owns several residential real estate projects in Dallas and became the controlling shareholder in Comstock Resources, an oil and gas company in Texas, in 2018.

Jones' most valuable asset is the Cowboys, which he purchased for $150 million in 1989.

Forbes now values the team at roughly $10 billion.

Jerry Jones' net worth

Jones has a net worth of $16.7 billion as of Jan. 7, per Forbes. That makes him the 123rd-richest person in the world.

Forget a last WWE title – appreciate Cena's final tour

Jordan Mendoza
USA TODAY

John Cena makes his entrance during WWE Monday Night Raw on Netflix on Jan. 6 at the Intuit Dome in Inglewood, California. COURTESY OF WWE

INGLEWOOD, Calif. – Of all the things that have made John Cena one of the prominent names in wrestling history, an underrated aspect of him is his honesty. What you see on screen and in the ring is what you get outside of it.

So when John Cena talks about the uncertainty of capturing a 17th WWE championship – which would be the most in company history – he means it.

When he came out for the first Monday Night Raw on Netflix, back in Southern California where his wrestling career began, fans probably expected him to announce his quest for history and lay out the plans to face some of the biggest names and champions. Instead, Cena wasn't so sure. He was hopeful, yes – but plenty of doubt rests in his mind.

He doesn't see it happening, and his time is almost up.

"I just want to set realistic expectations for everyone," Cena said. "I will give you everything I got. You got my word, I always have. I've always given you everything I have. I just don't know what that looks like."

When Cena announced in July he would be ending his wrestling career for good in 2025, the speculation and hope from the WWE universe was that the decorated star would capture the top prize in the company one last time, and by any means necessary. In a time where anyone will make a case that someone is being buried on the roster over a veteran just getting the title because of the name, people want Cena to bury anyone and everyone on a path to No. 17.

The only problem is, Cena shuns any thought of it.

"I know how hard it is to go from the bottom to the middle of the menu to the semi main event to get that spot," he said. "What I didn't want to do – in the last time we share some time with each other – is walk in and demand it, because that's not fair to the current WWE locker room. That's not fair to the audience, and that feels bad."

It's hard to come to grasp with, but it is also refreshing. Cena understands he isn't the same person that could put in main event performances night in and night out. He is 47 and about to turn 48 just after WrestleMania 41 in April.

Yes, Cena is just one year older than CM Punk, but he clearly isn't showing signs of ending his time soon. He is putting in the work to make a claim for a championship shot and make sure he can continue his run past 2025. Meanwhile, Cena is just trying to make sure his body can hold up for the next 358 days.

Starting the farewell tour in the Los Angeles area is a bit coincidental, since it was less than 10 years ago the city saw something similar. It is very reminiscent of how Kobe Bryant did his last season in the NBA. After giving basketball all he could and becoming one of the game's and Los Angeles' greats, Bryant wasn't chasing a championship to go out on top. That Lakers team won only 17 games and finished last in the Western Conference.

But what that last season of basketball was for Bryant was to take a moment and appreciate all he did for basketball. He was given tributes and standing ovations in every city he traveled to. During the grind of that 82-game season, he was doing everything he could to make sure he could make it to the end. Did he ever, putting up one last signature performance in his last time lacing up the sneakers.

It's just about the same when it comes to Cena. As much as it would be sweet to win one more, he doesn't need to and doesn't have to.

That's where most WWE fans are missing the point of this entire run. Cena didn't have to come back for one last dance. This farewell tour is all about celebrating the accomplishments and moments that helped Cena become the main event of the century, and showing us glimpses that Father Time hasn't completely caught up to him yet.

Just like how basketball fans soaked in every last fadeaway jumper, every wrestling fan should take a moment to show appreciation and gratitude in every last Attitude Adjustment and Five-Knuckle Shuffle. It doesn't need to be done chasing for championship gold for it to be special, it's already going to be a remarkable ride.

Of course, Cena couldn't leave the window completely closed. He will be competing in the men's Royal Rumble match, which would guarantee him a WrestleMania 41 title shot should he win the match for a third time. The odds are slim, but Cena can't be counted out. Maybe he'll have an epic final performance just like Bryant.

However, if the Royal Rumble comes and he doesn't win, that's OK. If he doesn't get a shot at Elimination Chamber, that's OK. And if he doesn't end WrestleMania with gold in his hands, that's OK.

It's remarkable that Cena gave more than two decades of greatness to this form of art.

"We spent like 23 years together," Cena said. "This is our last time to get together and make some noise. Whatever comes to that, comes to that. I just want to get us together one more time to have a good time."

There are likely generations of fans that will be emotional seeing the man they grew up with ending his career, and younger ones that are going to marvel at the fact they got to see Cena in their life. No matter how this run ends, it will be one cherished in the lives of WWE fans for as long as they can remember.

So the time is now. Enjoy every second of it.

FOR THE RECORD

All times ET

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

USA TODAY Sports Women's Coaches Poll

Rank, team (1sts)	W-L	Pts	LW
1 UCLA (31)	15-0	775	1
2 South Carolina	14-1	741	2
3 Notre Dame	12-2	694	3
4 LSU	17-0	659	4
5 Southern Cal	14-1	654	5
6 Texas	15-1	630	6
7 Maryland	14-0	590	7
8 UConn	13-2	550	8
9 Ohio State	14-0	534	9
10 Kansas State	15-1	480	11
11 Oklahoma	13-2	448	10
12 TCU	15-1	444	12
13 Georgia Tech	15-0	405	14
14 Duke	12-3	347	15
15 Tennessee	13-1	341	13
16 Kentucky	13-1	317	16
17 West Virginia	12-2	263	18
18 North Carolina	13-3	230	17
19 Alabama	15-1	215	20
19 North Carolina State	11-3	215	19
21 Michigan State	12-2	163	21
22 Utah	12-2	86	27
23 Iowa	12-3	82	22
24 Florida State	13-2	58	31
25 California	14-2	43	23

Dropped out: No. 24 Baylor 12-3, No. 25 Ole Miss 10-4.

Others receiving votes: Baylor 12-3 34; Ole Miss 10-4 20; Vanderbilt 14-2 16; Minnesota 15-1 11; Michigan 10-4 9; Saint Joseph's 12-2 8; South Dakota State 12-3 5; Harvard 12-1 2; Creighton 12-3 2; George Mason 12-2 1; FGCU 11-3 1; Seton Hall 12-3 1; Nebraska 11-4 1.

The USA TODAY Sports board of coaches is made up of 31 head coaches at Division I institutions. All are members of the Women's Basketball Coaches Association.

NFL

American Conference

East

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Buffalo	13	4	0	.765	525	368
Miami	8	9	0	.471	345	364
N.Y. Jets	5	12	0	.294	338	404
New England	4	13	0	.235	289	417

North

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Baltimore	12	5	0	.706	518	361
Pittsburgh	10	7	0	.588	380	347
Cincinnati	9	8	0	.529	472	434
Cleveland	3	14	0	.176	258	435

South

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Houston	10	7	0	.588	372	372
Indianapolis	8	9	0	.471	377	427
Jacksonville	4	13	0	.235	320	435
Tennessee	3	14	0	.176	311	460

West

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Kansas City	15	2	0	.882	385	326
L.A. Chargers	11	6	0	.647	402	301
Denver	10	7	0	.588	425	311
Las Vegas	4	13	0	.235	309	434

National Conference

East

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Philadelphia	14	3	0	.824	463	303
Washington	12	5	0	.706	485	391
Dallas	7	10	0	.412	350	468
N.Y. Giants	3	14	0	.176	273	415

North

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Detroit	15	2	0	.882	564	342
Minnesota	14	3	0	.824	432	332
Green Bay	11	6	0	.647	460	338
Chicago	5	12	0	.294	310	370

South

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
Tampa Bay	10	7	0	.588	502	385
Atlanta	8	9	0	.471	389	423
Carolina	5	12	0	.294	341	534
New Orleans	5	12	0	.294	338	398

West

	W	L	T	Pct	PF	PA
L.A. Rams	10	7	0	.588	367	386
Seattle	10	7	0	.588	375	368
Arizona	8	9	0	.471	400	379
San Francisco	6	11	0	.353	389	436

Wild card matchups

Saturday's Games

L.A. Chargers at Houston, 4:30 p.m.
Pittsburgh at Baltimore, 8 p.m.

Sunday's Games

Denver at Buffalo, 1 p.m.
Green Bay at Philadelphia, 4:30 p.m.
Washington at Tampa Bay, 8 p.m.

Monday's Game

Minnesota at L.A. Rams, 8 p.m.

NBA

EASTERN CONFERENCE

Atlantic Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Boston	26	10	.722	–
N.Y. Knicks	24	13	.649	2½
Philadelphia	14	20	.412	11
Brooklyn	13	23	.361	13
Toronto	8	28	.222	18

Southeast Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Orlando	22	16	.579	–
Miami	17	16	.515	2½
Atlanta	18	18	.500	3
Charlotte	7	27	.206	13
Washington	6	27	.182	13½

Central Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Cleveland	31	4	.886	–
Milwaukee	18	16	.529	12½
Indiana	19	18	.514	13
Detroit	18	18	.500	13½
Chicago	17	19	.472	14½

WESTERN CONFERENCE

Southwest Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Houston	23	12	.657	–
Memphis	24	13	.649	–
Dallas	20	16	.556	3½
San Antonio	18	18	.500	5½
New Orleans	7	29	.194	16½

Northwest Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Oklahoma City	30	5	.857	–
Denver	20	14	.588	9½
Minnesota	18	17	.514	12
Portland	12	23	.343	18
Utah	9	25	.265	20½

Pacific Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
L.A. Lakers	20	15	.571	–
L.A. Clippers	20	16	.556	½
Golden State	18	17	.514	2
Sacramento	17	19	.472	3½
Phoenix	16	18	.471	3½

Tuesday's Games

Phoenix at Charlotte
Houston at Washington
L.A. Lakers at Dallas
Minnesota at New Orleans
Atlanta at Utah
Boston at Denver
Miami at Golden State

Wednesday's Games

Oklahoma City at Cleveland, 7 p.m.
Chicago at Indiana, 7 p.m.
Washington at Philadelphia, 7 p.m.
Detroit at Brooklyn, 7:30 p.m.
Toronto at N.Y. Knicks, 7:30 p.m.
Portland at New Orleans, 8 p.m.
L.A. Clippers at Denver, 9 p.m.
San Antonio at Milwaukee, 9:30 p.m.

NHL

Eastern Conference

Atlantic Division

	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Toronto	26	13	2	54	129	113
Florida	24	15	2	50	136	127
Boston	20	17	5	45	111	131
Tampa Bay	20	15	2	42	137	105
Montreal	19	18	3	41	122	136
Ottawa	19	17	2	40	112	111
Detroit	17	18	4	38	107	126
Buffalo	15	21	5	35	126	140

Metropolitan Division

	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Washington	26	10	4	56	148	108
New Jersey	25	15	3	53	137	109
Carolina	24	14	2	50	135	114
Pittsburgh	17	17	7	41	125	152
Columbus	17	17	6	40	137	145
Philadelphia	17	18	5	39	123	144
N.Y. Rangers	18	20	1	37	113	123
N.Y. Islanders	15	18	7	37	108	128

Western Conference

Central Division

	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Winnipeg	27	12	2	56	147	104
Minnesota	25	11	4	54	121	107
Colorado	25	15	1	51	140	131
Dallas	24	13	1	49	123	95
St. Louis	19	18	4	42	114	123
Utah	17	15	7	41	113	118
Nashville	13	20	7	33	98	123
Chicago	13	25	2	28	102	137

Pacific Division

	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Vegas	27	9	3	57	139	105
L.A. Kings	23	10	5	51	118	96
Edmonton	24	12	3	51	128	109
Vancouver	18	12	9	45	120	126
Calgary	18	14	7	43	105	120
Anaheim	17	18	4	38	101	118
Seattle	17	21	3	37	118	130
San Jose	13	23	6	32	110	149

NOTE: Two points for a win, one for OT loss.

Tuesday's Games

Edmonton at Boston
Ottawa at Detroit
Dallas at N.Y. Rangers
Columbus at Pittsburgh
Carolina at Tampa Bay
Toronto at Philadelphia
St. Louis at Minnesota
Nashville at Winnipeg
Calgary at Anaheim
Vegas at San Jose

Wednesday's Games

Vancouver at Washington, 7:30 p.m.
Colorado at Chicago, 7:30 p.m.
Florida at Utah, 10 p.m.
Calgary at L.A. Kings, 10:30 p.m.

SOCCER

English Premier League

	GP	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
Liverpool	19	14	4	1	47	19	46
Arsenal	20	11	7	2	39	18	40
Nott'm Forest	20	12	4	4	29	19	40
Chelsea	20	10	6	4	39	24	36
Newcastle	20	10	5	5	34	22	35
Man City	20	10	4	6	36	27	34
Bournemouth	20	9	6	5	30	23	33
Aston Villa	20	9	5	6	30	32	32
Fulham	20	7	9	4	30	27	30
Brighton	20	6	10	4	30	29	28
Brentford	20	8	3	9	38	35	27
Tottenham	20	7	3	10	42	30	24
West Ham	20	6	5	9	24	39	23
Man United	20	6	5	9	23	28	23
Crystal Palace	20	4	9	7	21	28	21
Everton	19	3	8	8	15	25	17
Ipswich Town	20	3	7	10	20	35	16
Wolverhampton	20	4	4	12	31	45	16
Leicester City	20	3	5	12	23	44	14
Southampton	20	1	3	16	12	44	6

Sports Weekly

On newsstands: We preview and pick the winner of every NFL wild-card playoff game and the two College Football Playoff semifinals. Plus, how can the Packers rekindle last year's playoff magic? We also go in-depth on the CFP teams, including how the quarterbacks – Ohio State's Will Howard and Texas' Quinn Ewers – have an intimate knowledge of their Playoff foes and how OSU has used its Michigan loss as fuel. In the other game, why Notre Dame and Penn State are on the rise but still have much to prove. In baseball, we look at one need for every team and potential avenues to fulfill them and remember our late writer, Steve DiMeglio, who covered the sport for Baseball Weekly. As a tribute, we feature one of his stories on the World Series-bound 2002 San Francisco Giants. And we have final NFL stats, and NFL, NBA and NHL box scores. You can order the edition at onlinestore.usatoday.com and subscribe to the magazine by going mysportsweekly.com or by calling 800-872-1415.

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COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Thursday

FAVORITE	LINE	O/U	UNDERDOG
Notre Dame	2.5	45.5	PENN STATE

Friday

FAVORITE	LINE	O/U	UNDERDOG
Ohio State	6	53.5	TEXAS

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North Dakota State celebrates winning the FCS championship Monday against Montana State.
MATTHEW PEARCE/ICON SPORTSWIRE VIA GETTY IMAGES

North Dakota State tops Montana State for 10th FCS crown

Scooby Axson USA TODAY

North Dakota State quarterback Cam Miller threw for 199 yards and two touchdowns and added 121 yards and two more scores on the ground as the Bison continued their dominance over the Football Championship Series ranks, winning their 10th national championship with a 35-32 win over top-seeded Montana State.

The Bison sprinted to a 21-3 halftime lead after Miller scored two rushing touchdowns and added a 1-yard touchdown pass to Bryce Lance.

The Bobcats, who came into the game Monday evening undefeated, came back behind Walter Payton Award winner Tommy Mellott and cut the lead to three at 28-25 early in the fourth quarter on a spectacular 44-yard touchdown run.

Mellott had 135 yards on 14 carries and threw for 195 yards and two touchdowns for the Bobcats, who were seeking their first national championship since 1984 and now have lost six straight games to North Dakota State, all in the playoffs, including a heartbreaking second-round defeat last season when they had an extra point attempt blocked in overtime.

Each of North Dakota State's 10 championships has come in the past 14 seasons. The Bison won their first title in 2011, and it was the first of five in a row. James Madison won the FCS crown in 2016, but the Bison rattled off a three-peat, beating the Dukes in 2019, becoming the first team in college football to end the season 16-0.

In 2021, NDSU beat Montana State 38–10 for their ninth title but were routed in the title game the following season by South Dakota State, the first of its two consecutive championships.

WEATHER

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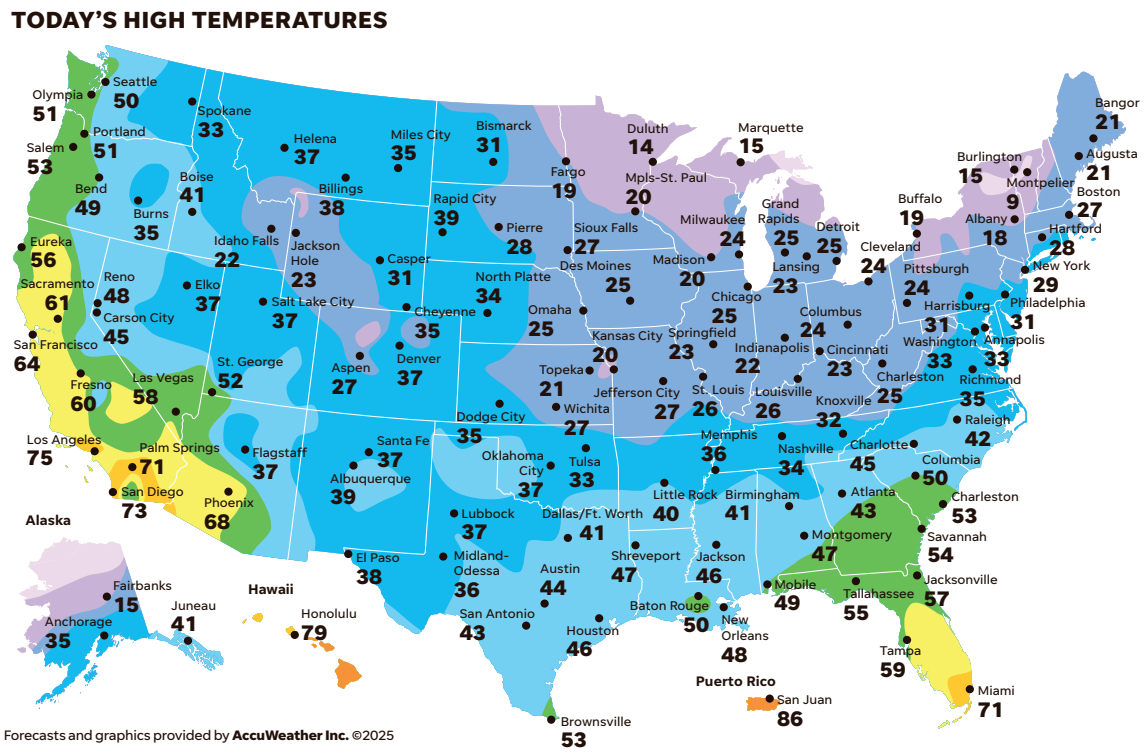
TODAY'S FORECAST

A Santa Ana wind event is expected to produce gusts around 30-50 mph in Southern **California** today. The foothills and canyons may have frequent gusts of 50-70 mph and even close to 100 mph. The high winds and dry air will lead to a heightened wildfire threat. Tree limbs and power lines may come down, and travel in crosswinds may be dangerous.

A winter storm is expected to emerge from the Sierra Madre of **New Mexico** as well as the **High Plains** in western **Texas**, mainly late in the day and night, before spreading snow and ice farther to the east in **Texas** Thursday.

The lake effect will produce locally heavy snow to upstate **New York**, **Michigan**, western **Pennsylvania**, northeastern **Ohio**, northwestern **Indiana** and part of **West Virginia**. Much of the eastern two-thirds of the nation will be dry and cold.

TODAY'S HIGH TEMPERATURES



Forecasts and graphics provided by **AccuWeather Inc.** ©2025

Below 10 | 10s | 20s | 30s | 40s | 50s | 60s | 70s | 80s | 90s | 100s | 110+

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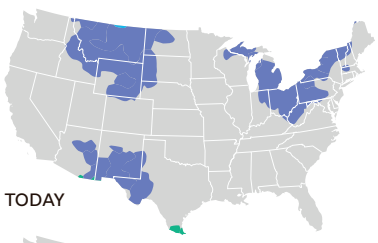
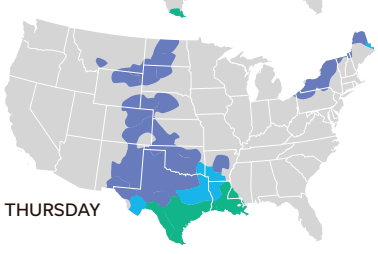
PRECIPITATION FORECAST

T-storms | Rain | Snow | Ice/mix



TODAY



THURSDAY

EXTREMES

Note: For contiguous 48 states through 3 p.m. ET yesterday

HOTTEST: 70° Oxnard, Calif.

COLDEST: -22° Kabetogama, Minn.

TOP TRAVEL CITIES Air quality index (AQI)

	WED	THU	FRI	AQI
ATLANTA	Breezy 43/23	Sunny 44/30	Rain, sleet 35/31	Moderate
BALTIMORE	Windy, cold 32/17	Windy, cold 31/19	Clouding up 32/23	Good
BOSTON	Sunny, breezy 27/18	Windy 31/24	Not as cold 37/24	Good
CHARLOTTE	Sunny, chilly 45/22	Sunny, chilly 42/22	A wintry mix 38/31	Good
CHICAGO	Cold 25/11	Partly sunny 26/20	A bit of snow 28/21	Moderate
DALLAS/FT. WORTH	Very cold 41/32	Snow, ice, 1-2" 35/30	A.M. snow 38/24	Moderate
DENVER	Not as cold 37/21	A little snow 31/12	Sunny 37/27	Moderate
DETROIT	A snow shower 25/12	Sunny, cold 26/16	A bit of snow 26/22	Moderate
HONOLULU	A few showers 79/71	Shower 81/72	A P.M. shower 82/69	Good
HOUSTON	Incr. clouds 46/37	Becoming rainy 40/36	A little rain 42/30	Good
LAS VEGAS	Breezy 58/40	Sunny 61/36	Mostly sunny 58/37	Moderate
LOS ANGELES	Breezy 75/47	Plenty of sun 72/48	Mostly sunny 72/46	Moderate
MIAMI	Sunny, nice 71/51	Sunny, nice 67/53	Partly sunny 76/65	Good
MPLS-ST. PAUL	Partly sunny 20/14	Low clouds 27/19	A.M. flurries 29/17	Moderate
NEW ORLEANS	Sunny, chilly 48/36	A little rain 49/45	Rain 53/37	Good
NEW YORK	Windy, cold 29/19	Windy 32/24	Breezy 37/27	Moderate
ORLANDO	Sunny 62/39	Sunny, cool 58/39	Warmer 71/59	Good
PHILADELPHIA	Windy 31/19	Windy 32/24	Breezy 36/25	Moderate
PHOENIX	Windy 68/44	Plenty of sun 64/46	Sunny 65/40	Unhealthy s/g
SALT LAKE CITY	Partly sunny 37/23	Sunlit 38/23	Turning cloudy 41/30	Moderate
SAN DIEGO	Windy 73/43	Plenty of sun 69/45	Sunny, nice 71/46	Moderate
SAN FRANCISCO	Breezy 64/45	Sunlit 64/46	Partly sunny 60/46	Moderate
SEATTLE	Partly sunny 50/36	Partly sunny 48/42	Rain 50/38	Moderate
WASHINGTON	Cold 33/19	Windy, cold 31/19	Cold 31/24	Good

c Cloudy **f** Fog **i** Ice **r** Rain **sf** Snowflurries **sn** Snow **w** Windy **dr** Drizzle **h** Haze **pc** Partly cloudy **s** Sunny **sh** Showers **t** Thunderstorms

U.S. CITIES

	TODAY	THU
Akron, Ohio	21/10sf	22/9pc
Albany, N.Y.	18/10w	21/17w
Albuquerque	39/20sf	38/23c
Allentown, Pa.	28/16w	31/21w
Amarillo, Texas	41/25s	35/20sn
Anaheim, Calif.	74/44w	74/48s
Anchorage, Alaska	35/28c	33/29sn
Aspen, Colo.	27/9s	25/-4pc
Atlantic City, N.J.	32/19w	35/23w
Augusta, Ga.	51/22s	47/22s
Austin, Texas	44/35pc	38/34r
Bakersfield, Calif.	62/37s	61/39s
Baton Rouge, La.	50/29s	46/39r
Billings, Mont.	38/26sn	37/21s
Birmingham, Ala.	41/21s	43/31pc
Bismarck, N.D.	31/26pc	31/13sn
Boise, Idaho	41/24pc	40/27s
Buffalo, N.Y.	19/15sf	23/15sf
Burlington, Vt.	15/11sn	22/18sn
Cedar Rapids, Iowa	21/8pc	26/20pc
Charleston, S.C.	53/28s	48/29s
Charleston, W.Va.	25/13sf	24/4pc
Cheyenne, Wyo.	35/20sn	26/13c
Cincinnati	23/3pc	24/8s
Cleveland	24/16sf	23/13w
Colorado Springs	34/19pc	31/12sf
Columbia, S.C.	50/24s	45/22s
Columbus, Ohio	24/13sf	22/7pc
Corpus Christi, Texas	45/40c	44/40r
Dayton, Ohio	24/8sf	22/11s
Daytona Beach, Fla.	59/36s	54/40s
Des Moines, Iowa	25/11pc	31/23pc
Duluth, Minn.	14/6pc	20/16c
Durham, N.C.	39/21s	38/21s
El Paso, Texas	38/28sn	41/28sf
Fairbanks, Alaska	15/6pc	21/11c
Flagstaff, Ariz.	37/10sf	33/14w
Fargo, N.D.	19/15c	31/17sn
Fort Myers, Fla.	67/44s	66/43s
Fort Smith, Ark.	36/21pc	33/27sn
Fort Wayne, Ind.	27/15sf	25/13s
Fresno, Calif.	60/36s	59/39s
Grand Rapids, Mich.	25/11sn	26/18c
Green Bay, Wis.	20/8s	24/20pc
Greensboro, N.C.	38/19s	36/18s
Greenville, S.C.	45/22s	44/24s
Harrisburg, Pa.	31/20w	32/23w
Hartford, Conn.	28/15w	26/19w
Indianapolis	22/2pc	24/12s
Islip, N.Y.	29/18w	33/23w
Jackson, Miss.	46/24s	45/33pc
Jacksonville, Fla.	57/30s	53/30s
Jefferson City, Mo.	27/4s	40/28pc
Kansas City	20/9s	32/23pc
Key West, Fla.	66/58pc	67/61s
Knoxville, Tenn.	32/18pc	34/23s
Laredo, Texas	44/38r	40/38r
Lexington, Ky.	24/4c	27/11s
Lincoln, Neb.	26/15s	38/24c
Little Rock, Ark.	40/22s	34/28sn
Long Beach, Calif.	76/46w	74/46s
Louisville, Ky.	26/4pc	31/16s
Lubbock, Texas	37/28c	36/24sn
Madison, Wis.	20/8pc	28/19pc
Manchester, N.H.	24/13w	26/21w
Memphis, Tenn.	36/22s	39/28pc
Milwaukee	24/13pc	31/22c
Mobile, Ala.	49/28s	51/38pc
Modesto, Calif.	60/34s	60/36s
Montgomery, Ala.	47/22s	48/32s
Myrtle Beach, S.C.	47/25s	44/23s
Nags Head, N.C.	37/26s	36/26w
Nashville, Tenn.	34/17s	38/26s
Newark, N.J.	31/20w	33/26w
New Haven, Conn.	31/23w	33/26w
Norfolk, Va.	37/24pc	34/26s
Oakland, Calif.	63/41s	64/42s
Oklahoma City	37/25s	34/27sn
Omaha, Neb.	25/15s	33/24c
Palm Springs, Calif.	71/47w	74/48s
Pensacola, Fla.	50/31s	52/41pc
Pierre, S.D.	28/21pc	34/14sn
Pittsburgh	24/12sf	22/6pc
Portland, Maine	24/13pc	27/22w
Portland, Ore.	51/38pc	52/39pc
Providence, R.I.	28/14w	29/23w
Raleigh, N.C.	42/22s	38/21s
Rapid City, S.D.	39/29sn	34/14sn
Reno, Nev.	48/23pc	50/24s
Richmond, Va.	35/18c	36/14s
Rochester, N.Y.	20/14sf	23/17sf
Sacramento, Calif.	61/37s	64/39s
San Antonio	43/36c	38/36r
San Jose, Calif.	67/40s	67/41s
Santa Fe, N.M.	37/17c	36/16c
Sarasota, Fla.	61/44s	61/42s
Savannah, Ga.	54/27s	50/29s
Scottsdale, Ariz.	66/37s	63/42s
Shreveport, La.	47/28s	39/33i
Sioux Falls, S.D.	27/17pc	32/19sf
South Bend, Ind.	28/17sf	29/17s
Spokane, Wash.	33/26c	33/26pc
Springfield, Mo.	25/13s	38/25pc
Springfield, Ill.	23/3pc	25/20pc
St. Louis	26/5s	28/27s
St. Petersburg, Fla.	58/44s	58/43s
Syracuse, N.Y.	21/15sn	23/16sf
Tallahassee, Fla.	55/29s	54/33s
Tampa, Fla.	59/41s	59/41s
Toledo, Ohio	28/15sf	30/16pc
Topeka, Kan.	21/10s	34/26pc
Tucson, Ariz.	57/33w	59/37c
Tupelo, Miss.	40/20s	39/32pc
Tulsa, Okla.	33/22pc	36/27sn
Virginia Beach, Va.	38/26w	36/26w
Wichita, Kan.	27/16s	33/23pc
Wilmington, Del.	33/17w	34/22w
Winston-Salem, N.C.	39/20s	36/19s
Worcester, Mass.	22/12w	25/20w

WORLD CITIES

	TODAY	THU
Beijing	36/17s	37/13s
Buenos Aires	84/72s	85/74s
Cancun, Mexico	76/65pc	76/66c
Dubai, UAE	78/64pc	75/61pc
Frankfurt	42/34sh	45/30sh
Hong Kong	68/59c	68/53c
Istanbul	61/51pc	59/48c
Jerusalem	60/47h	61/44h
Johannesburg	77/61t	73/60t
London	37/28c	38/27s
Mexico City	69/47pc	70/51c
Montreal	12/9sf	20/14sn
Moscow	40/31r	34/31c
Mumbai, India	89/70h	89/71h
Paris	52/40r	45/33sh
Rio de Janeiro	81/73r	79/72t
Rome	60/53c	62/51pc
Seoul	33/11h	19/11s
Singapore	90/78pc	87/77h
Sydney	71/66sh	74/68sh
Toronto	18/12c	24/14pc
Tokyo	53/40s	55/35s

MLB All-Star sluggers still unsigned

Bob Nightengale
Columnist
USA TODAY

There has been $2.6 billion spent in these first 69 days of free agency in Major League Baseball, but with five weeks remaining until spring training, everyone but the powerful Los Angeles Dodgers still have Dunkin' Donut-sized holes left to be filled.

While the New York Mets, Dodgers and Yankees stole the headlines by spending $1.45 billion this winter and three teams in the National League West dropped at least $180 million in free agency, one-third of all teams have shelled out less than the $10 million Juan Soto will earn the first six weeks on his new job with the Mets.

Six teams still haven't spent a single penny in free agency. Yes, we're talking about the Miami Marlins, Milwaukee Brewers, St. Louis Cardinals, San Diego Padres and Seattle Mariners.

In the NL Central, the Chicago Cubs have spent just $43.3 million – $8 million less than Soto's annual salary – which is still more than the combined total of expenditures by the rest of the NL Central. The Cincinnati Reds spent $24.4 million bringing back Nick Martinez and Brent Suter; the Pittsburgh Pirates gave Andrew McCutchen $5 million to return. The Brewers and Cardinals not only haven't spent anything, but lost some of their highest-paid players.

There were eight teams that were willing to shell out at least $600 million for Soto. Only the Mets were successful. And yet the Yankees and Dodgers are the only Soto bidders to ultimately spend big money this winter.

"It tells you that either a lot of teams just don't have the money," one general manager said, "or that they do have the money and are just waiting to see how they plan to spend it. We're about to find out."

While the free agent market is expected to remain slow this week with general managers and agents tied up in arbitration cases preparing for filings on Thursday, here are the top questions heading into the stretch drive of the offseason.

Where will Pete Alonso sign?

Remember in 2019 when Bryce Harper and Manny Machado didn't sign their $300 million contracts until after the start of spring training?

Well, the same could happen again.

For Alonso, a return to the Mets seems to be the likely outcome, but on a deal shorter than his desires. The Mets, after already committing $918.1 million this winter, including a stunning $765 million for Soto, are holding their ground on Alonso. While they'd like a reunion with the four-time All-Star who has hit 226 home runs, they simply aren't willing to give him a long-term deal for at least $200 million, not after his career-worst .788 OPS last season. Then again, no one else is either. Teams are reluctant to eclipse Freddie Freeman's six-year, $162 million contract and Matt Olson's eight-year, $168 million deal, while Alonso's agent, Scott Boras, uses Prince Fielder's nine-year, $214 million contract with the Tigers in 2012 as a comparison.

Teams generally have been reluctant giving out long-term contracts this winter. There are only five free agents who have received contracts of five or more years: Soto, 15 years, $765 million; Max Fried, 7 years, $218 million; Corbin Burnes, 6 years, $210 million; Willy Adames, 7 years, $182 million; and Blake Snell, 5 years, $182 million.

There currently are eight teams showing at least some interest in Alonso, including the Blue Jays and Red Sox. But in the game of first base musical chairs where 11 teams have a new first baseman, Alonso is still left standing. He may have no choice but to return to the Mets on a short-term deal with an opt-out.

Pete Alonso, still unsigned, celebrates after hitting a home run for the Mets against the Brewers in the playoffs. PATRICK MCDERMOTT/GETTY IMAGES

What's latest Alex Bregman news?

The Astros certainly wanted Bregman back and offered a six-year, $156 million deal. But when talks stalled they decided they couldn't afford to wait any longer until moving on.

Bregman, 30, a two-time World Series champion, certainly is drawing plenty of interest, but just not at the $200 million price range ... at least not yet.

Red Sox manager Alex Cora has been vocal in his desire to sign him, and the team has spent only $52.5 million. Yet with Rafael Devers not wanting to move from third base, Triston Casas at first base, and Vaughn Grissom and top infield prospects on the way at second base, GM Craig Breslow is hesitant.

The Tigers, with manager A.J. Hinch lobbying for him, certainly have an opening. If they sign him, the Tigers could be the favorites to win the American League Central. But there's still a wide gap in contract talks.

The Blue Jays, who continue to be left at the altar among free agents, have shown the strongest interest, but just how much more do they have to pay him than the next highest bidder with their high tax rates and distance from his home in Phoenix?

The Phillies would have interest, but only if they traded third baseman Alec Bohm, and their steep asking price is why Bohm still remains with the club.

The Mets could be the most intriguing team in the Bregman/Alonso sweepstakes. Several executives believe that if the Mets don't sign Bregman and move third baseman Mark Vientos to first base, they'll sign Alonso. And if they don't sign Alonso, they'll shift to Bregman.

The biggest obstacle for Bregman is that the Cardinals also have a premier third baseman on the market, and Nolan Arenado said he'll waive his no-trade clause to the Red Sox and Mets.

Where will Japanese pitching star Roki Sasaki sign?

While the Dodgers have been the heavy favorites to sign Sasaki for the past year, with some teams convinced he already made up his mind, the Padres have emerged as the new choice among executives.

Sure, if he wants the bright lights, the marketing endorsements, and the chance to win the World Series every year, the Dodgers are his team. But if he wants a more tranquil market and play with his mentor Yu Darvish, the Padres are his team.

Let's be honest, the Padres need Sasaki a whole lot more than the Dodgers.

The Padres are without Joe Musgrove all season, starters Dylan Cease and Michael King are free agents after 2025, and even if Sasaki can't pitch more than 120-140 innings his first year, the Padres may not be able to make a return trip to the postseason without him.

The Dodgers would love to have Sasaki, but if they don't sign him, they'll be just fine.

Are Dodgers and Yankees done with business?

No.

The Dodgers, who've spent $364 million this winter if you include the Tommy Edman extension, are never done.

They wasted no time shopping infielder Gavin Lux after signing Korean infielder Hyeseong Kim and moved him Monday to the Cincinnati Reds for outfield prospect Mike Sirota and a draft pick. They have promised Mookie Betts the opportunity to be their everyday shortstop, but if he struggles defensively as he did a year ago, plans could always change. They certainly have the resources – financially and prospects – to satisfy any deficiencies at any time.

The Yankees, who pounced quickly after Soto turned down their $760 million offer by signing Fried to an eight-year, $218 million contract, trading for closer Devin Williams and outfielder Cody Bellinger, and signing first baseman Paul Goldschmidt – now are seeking a left-handed reliever and an infielder.

They are actively trying to deal starter Marcus Stroman, clearing his $18 million salary. They have had talks with free agent left-handed reliever Andrew Chafin and infielder Brendan Rodgers.

The best news for the Yankees is that the AL has gotten weaker this winter, with the National League teams outspending the AL by nearly $900 million.

Will any free agent take Blue Jays' money?

The Blue Jays keep offering mountains of money but can't find anyone to take it. They offered more than $700 million for Soto. They were willing to spend at least $250 million for Burnes. They were outbid for Fried. They have an offer for slugger Anthony Santander, and they're showing strong interest in Bregman and Alonso, too.

Yet they have spent only $15 million in free agency, begging for free agents to take their money in a critical season where anything short of a postseason berth is catastrophic.

This is the final year before Vladimir Guerrero and Bo Bichette leave town as free agents. Bichette is as good as gone, with no real interest in returning, friends say. Guerrero and the Blue Jays are at least $100 million apart, with Guerrero seeking at least $450 million.

If Guerrero doesn't receive an extension by spring training, he will test free agency.

What's biggest surprise of free agency?

The lack of activity among relievers.

The creme de la creme of the free agent market remains intact with no one budging yet.

Closers Tanner Scott, Jeff Hoffman, Kirby Yates, Kenley Jansen, David Robertson and Carlos Estevez all remain unsigned.

There are only four relievers who have signed for more than $10 million and one is being converted into a starter, Clay Holmes, who signed a three-year, $38 million contract with the Mets. The others: Blake Treinen, two years, $22 million with the Dodgers; Yimi Garcia, two years, $15 million with the Blue Jays; and Aroldis Chapman, one year, $10.08 million with the Red Sox.

"The market is going to start moving here quick," one agent said, "there are too many good relievers out there. The trouble is that right now these teams think back-end relievers are interchangeable."

What teams still have moves to make?

Atlanta: Come on, you think GM Alex Anthopoulos, one of the most creative minds in the game, is going to just sit idly by without doing something this winter? The team already has shed $69 million by trading outfielder Jorge Soler, letting starters Fried and Charlie Morton walk, and declined the option on catcher Travis D'Arnaud. Yet so far, all the franchise has spent is $1.9 million in free agents without making another trade. Sure, Atlanta has ace Spencer Strider and 2023 MVP Ronald Acuna Jr. returning at some point after season-ending surgeries, but still, you know Anthopoulos has something up his sleeve.

Mariners: The Mariners are $80 million below the luxury tax and can't afford to waste the best starting rotation in baseball once again. They say they don't have the money to grab Bregman or Alonso, or even acquire Arenado, but if they move veteran starter Luis Castillo, it will instantly free money for offensive help.

Orioles: The Orioles have the deepest and youngest offensive talent in the game, but they need pitching. They just lost Burnes, after aggressively trying to bring him back, and replaced him with the 41-year-old Morton. They need more help. At some point, acquiring Castillo from the Mariners for some of their young talented hitters only makes sense.

Cubs: The Cubs made the biggest splash of the trade season by acquiring All-Star right fielder Kyle Tucker from the Astros but also dumped Bellinger and his $27.5 million on the Yankees to even out the money. The Cubs have only spent $43.3 million in free agency. It's hard to imagine they won't do something else to try finally toppling Milwaukee in the NL Central.

Padres: They haven't made a single trade. They haven't signed a single free agent. And, yes, GM A.J. Preller is still breathing. The Padres say they're in a money crunch, shopping infielders Xander Bogaerts and Jake Cronenworth, and listening on starter Dylan Cease and batting champion Luis Arráez, but they're sending mixed messages by also inquiring about high-priced talent.

Giants: The Giants pounced early on shortstop Adames with an eight-year, $182 million contract and promised to be aggressive, but then stopped. They finished fourth in the NL West last season, and they still may be only the fourth-best team in the division with the Dodgers only getting better and the Diamondbacks putting together a fabulous rotation. They have shown interest in Alonso, but not strong enough to be considered a front-runner by any stretch of the imagination. Surely, more moves await.

Raiders fire coach Antonio Pierce after 4-13 finish

Michael Middlehurst-Schwartz
USA TODAY

The Las Vegas Raiders are rebooting again.

The team on Tuesday fired Antonio Pierce after a 4-13 season, the head coach's first full campaign in the top job. Pierce went 5-4 as the team's interim coach to close out 2023.

Owner Mark Davis will now be hiring his sixth different full-time coach since taking over the franchise in 2011.

"We appreciate Antonio's leadership, first as an interim head coach and this past season as the head coach," the Raiders said in a statement. "Antonio grew up a Raiders fan and his Silver and Black roots run deep. We are grateful for his ability to reignite what it means to be a Raider throughout the entire organization. We wish nothing but the best for Antonio and his family in the future."

Pierce met with the media on Monday and said he hadn't been given any reason to believe he wouldn't be back.

Davis had seemingly put Pierce on notice with his December remarks that he was dissatisfied with the results.

"I'm very disappointed, obviously. I want to see progress," Davis said at the NFL league meeting, according to The Athletic. "There's no excuses. We have injuries and all of those things, but your team has to figure out how to get around those issues. The bottom line ... is it comes down to me. And, if there's going to be a finger pointed, it should be at me because, again, I'm the one who's hiring the people who make the decisions on the field."

Pierce

Despite a 2-2 start, the season unraveled quickly thereafter. Three-time All-Pro wide receiver Davante Adams requested a trade prior to Week 5, and Las Vegas dealt him to the New York Jets on Oct. 15 for a conditional 2025 third-round draft pick. Pierce also ridiculed his team's effort in a September loss to the Carolina Panthers, saying certain players made "business decisions" in the game. Offensive coordinator Luke Getsy, quarterbacks coach Rich Scangarello and offensive line coach James Cregg were all fired after Week 9, with the team at the midpoint of what would become a 10-game losing streak.

Las Vegas won two of its final three games, but the late push wasn't enough.

A Pro Bowl linebacker who played nine seasons in the NFL, Pierce joined the Raiders in 2022 as linebackers coach on Josh McDaniels' staff. When the Raiders fired McDaniels and general manager Dave Ziegler midway through last season, Pierce took over as the interim coach and quickly made his mark, winning the support of Adams and Pro Bowl defensive end Maxx Crosby for the full-time role.

HISTORY IN THE MAKING

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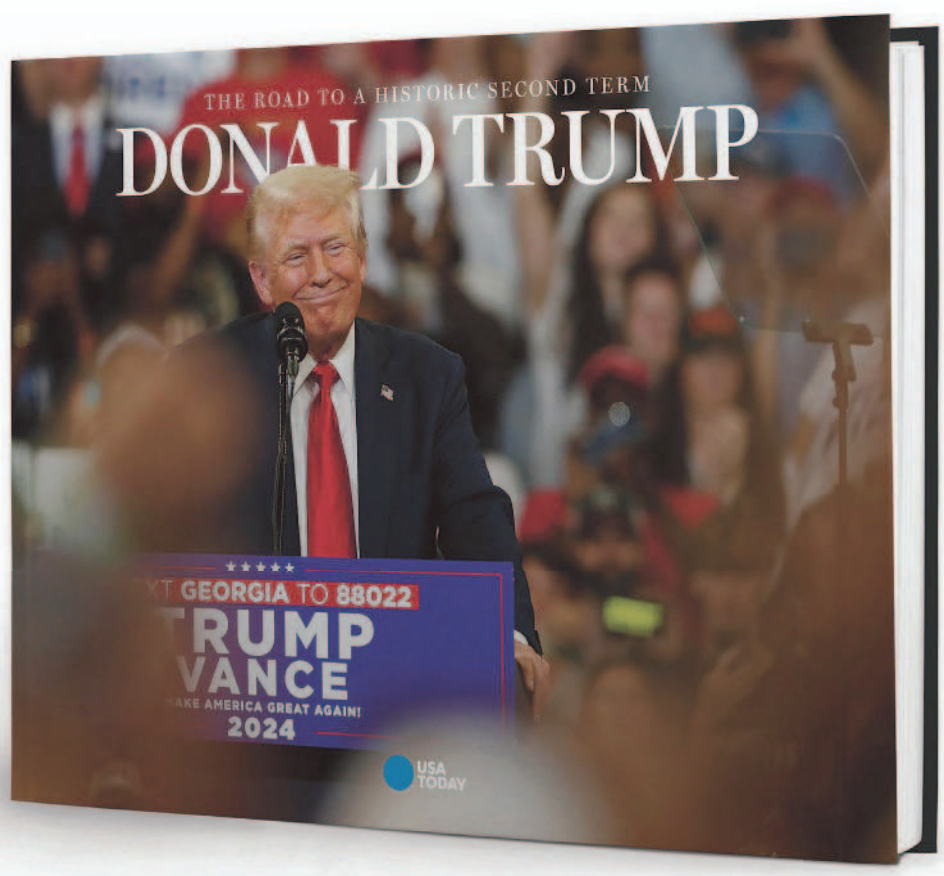

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USA TODAY

For Janelle James, vinyl and infrared saunas are essential

The "Abbott Elementary" star is learning about "rich people" wellness in LA. **Page 2D**

'Theatrical magic' brings new life to 'Death Becomes Her'

Illusionist Tim Clothier draws back the curtain on the stage adaptation of the 1992 film. **Page 4D**

LIFELINE

DAN MACMEDAN/USA TODAY

MAKING WAVES
ARIANA GRANDE

Fans of Ariana Grande were up in arms after the actress and singer was asked on the Golden Globes red carpet whether her grandmother was "still alive." An Access Hollywood reporter quizzed the "Wicked" star about whom she called first after her nomination for the Jan. 5 awards ceremony. When she said her mom, the reporter asked, "grandmother still alive?" Grande didn't appear offended by the question, but fans online called it "risky" and "sick."

IT'S YOUR BIRTHDAY
WHO'S CELEBRATING TODAY

Cynthia Erivo is 38. **Noah Cyrus** is 25. **Sam Levinson** is 40.

HOROSCOPE | SANCTUARY
More: www.sanctuaryworld.co

Aries (March 21-April 19). Juggling business expectations? Mercury's entrance to Capricorn helps to keep all your professional pins in the air!

Taurus (April 20-May 20). Leaning into your logical side? As Mercury enters Capricorn, adopting a pragmatic tone helps you communicate your point.

Gemini (May 21-June 21). Mercury's entrance to Capricorn can foster doom and gloom. Weirdly, it can also bring out your sarcastic side!

Cancer (June 22-July 22). Achieving a compromise? Resolving a stalemate is the sensible thing to do as Mercury enters Capricorn.

Leo (July 23-Aug. 22). Orderly thinking? Mercury's entrance to Capricorn encourages you to take life one task at a time.

Virgo (Aug. 23-Sept. 22). How you deliver your message matters as Mercury enters Capricorn. Beneath your solemn exterior, you've got jokes!

Libra (Sept.23-Oct. 23). Discussing the past? Conversations encourage you to reconnect with your heritage as Mercury enters Capricorn.

Scorpio (Oct. 24-Nov. 21). Getting to the point? You're not one to mince words as Mercury enters Capricorn. Straightforward speech sets the tone.

Sagittarius (Nov. 22-Dec. 21). Mercury's three-week stint in Capricorn is the perfect time to get your affairs in order!

Capricorn (Dec. 22-Jan. 19). Feeling chatty? Methodical communication is your strong suit over the next three weeks.

Aquarius (Jan. 20-Feb. 18). Fantasy meets reality as Mercury enters Capricorn. A wild idea may be more achievable than you think.

Pisces (Feb. 19-March 20). You commit to a venture for the long haul as Mercury enters Capricorn. Pool your resources.

MOVIES

A role like László Tóth is "very meaningful and very rare," says "The Brutalist" star Adrien Brody. PROVIDED BY A24

Adrien Brody draws on family's sacrifice to find truth in 'Brutalist'

Patrick Ryan USA TODAY

NEW YORK – At 29, Adrien Brody became the youngest man ever to win the best actor Oscar for the 2002 Holocaust drama "The Pianist." ● More than two decades later, he could very well clinch his second gold statue for "The Brutalist" (in select theaters now), playing a Hungarian-Jewish immigrant in Brady Corbet's 3½-hour epic. The character, a battered architect named László Tóth, is immensely personal to Brody, 51, whose father is Polish Jewish and mother is Hungarian. As a girl, she fled Budapest with her parents during the Hungarian Revolution, settling in New York in 1958. ● "Nothing really feels fictional about this film, even though it is a fictional story," says Brody, sipping tea on a rainy December afternoon. "It's inside me; it's deeply rooted in truth. Just last night, my mom sent me a whole slew of images: some from 'The Pianist,' some from my grandfather, some with my father holding me as a boy. It's all there: all the lives that I've lived and chapters in my life."

"The Brutalist" star is an Oscar front-runner after winning the best drama actor award at the Golden Globes. DAN MACMEDAN/USA TODAY

Brody recalls 'painful' experience of making 'The Pianist'

"Brutalist" spans several decades, beginning as László lands in Pennsylvania after World War II, where he shovels coal and bunks in his cousin's storage closet. Once a celebrated architect in his native Hungary, he eventually is scooped up by a wealthy industrialist (Guy Pearce), who commissions László to design and build an exorbitant community center. But even as he and his wife Erzsébet (Felicity Jones) attempt to forge a new life, they are constantly exploited and reminded they are "other."

Brody was struck by the "complexity" and "nuance" of Corbet's script, which he co-wrote with his partner, filmmaker Mona Fastvold.

"It's unfortunately taken me decades to find something like this," Brody says. "It's such an ambitious thing. But also, it instantly tapped into my mother and grandparents' struggle of coming to America. Even in spite of assimilating and becoming Americans, you're still a foreigner."

For Corbet, casting Brody was "very clear because of his family history," the director says. What's more, "he just felt so incredibly emotionally available; so graceful and so pained. I mean, he really just wore his heart on his sleeve."

With his angular features and searching eyes, Brody has been a

See BRODY, Page 2D

TV PREVIEW

Tim Allen's 'Shifting Gears' seems stuck in neutral

Kelly Lawler USA TODAY

The best thing I can say about "Shifting Gears," ABC's new Tim Allen-rants-about-woke-stuff-he-hates sitcom, is that I thought it would be a lot worse than it is.

Yes, eight years after the network canceled his last sitcom of the same genre, "Last Man Standing" (later picked up by Fox, where it ran until 2021), Allen is back on ABC. And now, instead of playing an overwrought patriarch working at an outdoorsy company battling with a wife and daughters, he's an overwrought patriarch who owns a classic car shop and battles one daughter, played by Kat Dennings. So different!

"Gears" (Wednesdays, 8 EST/PST, ★½☆☆), created by Mike Scully and Julie Thacker-Scully ("The Simpsons"), is neither original nor exciting; It's an unchallenging and not very funny package of generational stereotypes and grating banter between Allen and Dennings. The two episodes made available for review feature dialogue so bland it could have been written by AI. They lack excitement in any way, but are not so achingly terrible they offend the senses. And considering both Allen's track record and the recent spate of deeply disappointing multi-camera sitcoms on broadcast TV, that's actually an achievement. Expectations are everything.

Tim Allen is Matt, a widower and owner of a classic car restoration shop, who gets a brave new reality when his daughter Riley (Kat Dennings) is forced to move back home with her two kids. PROVIDED BY MIKE TAING/DISNEY

This series finds Allen as Matt, a widower, everyman and possessor of Fox News opinions. His quiet life is turned upside down (a sitcom must) when his daughter Riley (Dennings) moves back

See SHIFTING GEARS, Page 2D

THE ESSENTIALS

‘Abbott Elementary’ star loves ‘rich people’ wellness

Erin Jensen USA TODAY

Janelle James is schooling us on her Essentials. ● The actress and standup comedian helps “Abbott Elementary” score an A+ with Principal Ava’s manicured hands-off approach and one-liners sharper than a fresh No. 2 pencil. ● ABC’s Emmy-winning comedy returns from winter break Wednesday (8:30 p.m. ET/PT) with the first of two crossover episodes featuring the cast of FX’s “It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia.” ● “I’ve been a fan since the first one,” James says of “Sunny,” which premiered in 2005. “I was in in high school defending it. ‘No, it’s funny. It’s meant to be satire,’ ” she adds with a laugh. ● Mild mayhem ensues when the “Sunny” gang – Charlie (Charlie Day), Frank (Danny DeVito), Dennis (Glenn Howerton), Mac (Rob McElhenney) and Dee (Kaitlin Olson) – shows up at Abbott to volunteer. (The second installment of the characters mixing things up in the City of Brotherly Love will air as an episode of the FX series at a later date.)

“It was cool and surreal to have them on our set and to be on their set in Paddy’s Pub,” James adds. “Everybody was cool and nice, and Danny DeVito’s short and charming.”

Now onto the items making up James’ supplies list for life and comedy, from her top-tier comedian to her “rich people” wellness routine.

The ‘deceptively dark’ Richard Pryor inspires Janelle James

One name comes to mind for James’ all-time great comedian: the late Richard Pryor. “I have all his albums on vinyl,” she says. “That’s my main.”

James applauds the “deceptively dark” Pryor’s ability to find the light of a punchline in a grim situation.

“Everybody’s gone through things,” James says, “and I think the point of comedy is to talk about those things in a humorous way so people can feel that we’re all in this together.”

Detoxing from devices with vinyl

James recently acquired an Andover record player on which she spins the tracks of John Coltrane, LCD Soundsystem and Bossa Nova at Carnegie Hall. The latter “is lovely,” she says. “It makes me feel like I’m on ‘White Lotus,’ somewhere exotic.”

When James is listening to music, she’s looking to relax and break from her devices.

“I love to smoke a joint and lay on my floor and put my headphones on and listen to it that way,” she says.

Time for her hobbies, which include the drums

James longs to get back to her hobbies and the things she “used to do that didn’t involve work and scrolling the internet.”

She jams out on the drums and has started bass lessons.

“I would love to learn to play all instruments,” she says. “So that’s a commitment I’m making it to myself this year.”

And she wants to pick up her paint brushes once again. “I used to paint. I have all the equipment,” she says. “It’s just the doing.”

Infrared saunas and compression therapy

Now that James lives in LA, she’s doing as the Angelenos do and paying attention to her wellness.

“I’ve been crisscrossing the town, trying all the rich people (stuff) like float tanks,” she says. She’s fallen in love with infrared saunas and her sauna blanket, but not cryotherapy, which she describes as “torture.”

The compression device she uses for her legs is a must-have “because Ava wears heels every day, and I’m always running and flipping and doing (stuff) on this show,” James says. “I hurt myself every season, so that’s why I have all these things to keep myself together so I can continue to do this very physical comedy.”

Working out with Claire Underwood intensity

“My co-star Tyler (James Williams), every season, tells me to get on the ball because we’re doing so many episodes and this really is a strenuous gig,” James says. “Every season I come back bloated on margaritas from the summer and then I have to get in gear.”

Getting in shape previously meant James running late at night on her treadmill. But after injuring her ankle, she’s turned to her rowing machine for cardio. And since James is an actress, it may come as no surprise that in the gym she adopts a persona: Claire Underwood, Robin Wright’s character from “House of Cards.”

“Abbott Elementary” star Janelle James goes old-school with her playlist, spinning tracks on vinyl. She also plays drums and has started to learn bass. DAN MACMEDAN/USA TODAY

“I’m not a Type A (person). I really struggle with discipline,” James concedes. “So what do I have to do? I have to become someone else in order to accomplish this, and so that’s (when) I’m like I am in this this show and I’m this person, and I’m rowing my ass off.”

James also incorporates workouts with her Tonal, a recommendation from Williams.

“So I just rotate those things, and I stay in marginal shape,” she says laughing.

Candle warmers that keep her from burning down the house

“I’m obsessed with my house smelling good, but I can’t be trusted to not fall asleep with candles (blazing), because many times I fall asleep and I wake up and it’s looking at me, still lit,” James confesses. Her solution: candle warmers, which heat the candle and diffuse the scent without a flame.

Her favorite scent, which she planned on gifting her cast members for the holiday season, is Byredo’s Bibliothèque.

James detects a hint of crushed roses and perhaps vanilla in the warm scent that she loves for winter.

“I guess it could be a library in ‘Harry Potter,’ ” James says with a laugh. “Not like the New York Public Library or something.”

Brody

Continued from Page 1D

distinctive screen presence since his movie debut in 1989’s “New York Stories.” He worked with film giants Spike Lee (“Summer of Sam”) and Terrence Malick (“The Thin Red Line”) throughout the ’90s, before landing the role of real-life composer Wladyslaw Szpilman in Roman Polanski’s “Pianist.”

Given the “enormity” of Szpilman’s suffering during the Holocaust, the New York native felt an overwhelming responsibility to get it right. He lost 31 pounds to play the emaciated musician and isolated himself from family and friends during the shooting.

“It was very painful, but I’m unafraid to sacrifice for my work,” Brody recalls. “I really gave everything I could, but it was a lot to come out of: There were physiological repercussions of that starvation diet that lingered and were very hard to contend with. I gave up my place to live. I wasn’t living with my girlfriend anymore. I sold my car. Everything was in storage. I didn’t even have a phone number! I really went to a lot of extremes at that time.”

The movie also was an “emotional awakening” for the young actor, whose eyes were opened to “tremendous loss” and “the power of the human spirit to endure.” He fell into a yearlong depression after filming, coming home to New York just weeks before the 9/11 attacks.

“All of that fed into the darker state of mind,” Brody says. “It wasn’t just about the work – it was about what I discovered in the process.”

“It was a hard thing to follow up,” Adrien Brody says of his towering role in Holocaust drama “The Pianist.” PROVIDED BY GUY FERRANDIS/FOCUS FEATURES

Brody didn’t have ‘the same level of torment’ making ‘The Brutalist’

Brody has since learned to take a healthier approach to his characters. Given the ancestral connection he already felt to László, his primary task for “Brutalist” was mastering a Hungarian dialect.

“It took many years of trial and error, but with this film, I didn’t go home with the same level of torment,” Brody says. “Brady is also just a pleasure to discuss things with, and it felt very nurturing.”

Nevertheless, he has empathy for Method actors: “I’ve worked with lots of people who other people have found insufferable, but I’ve gotten on very well with them,” Brody says with a grin. “I don’t take an outburst too personally. I respect the artist’s mind and that yearning inside of them. If you’re that immersed in things, you can’t carry yourself in an optimal way with every aspect.”

Watching “Brutalist” was “both challenging and moving” for Brody’s parents, who joined him at Sunday’s Golden Globe Awards, where he picked up best actor in a drama.

As he heads into awards season, he feels a renewed sense of purpose and “hope for the future”: Brody has worked steadily these last 20 years, appearing in multiple Wes Anderson movies as well as HBO’s “Succession.”

Even still, he’s often felt that Hollywood didn’t know where exactly to place him.

“It’s frustrating at times, but that’s why people create works because they’re not given those opportunities,” says Brody, who has returned to his first love – painting – in recent years. He has a home studio in upstate New York, where he lives with his girlfriend, fashion designer Georgina Chapman.

“Painting resurfacing in my life provided a degree of creative autonomy that actors don’t have,” Brody says. “It gave me a sense of control and an ability to step back. The beauty of this film is that it hopefully reminds a lot of people of what I have been striving to bring to the table. It’s what actors constantly must do: be relevant, and remind filmmakers and producers that you are an asset.”

Now, “I feel like I can focus on what’s moving me and who I want to go on the next journey with,” Brody adds. “That’s a really good place to be for anybody pursuing artistic work. It’s usually a lot of near-fulfillment or catastrophic disappointment. (Laughs.) It’s not currently, so I’m grateful for that.”

Shifting Gears

Continued from Page 1D

home with her two kids amid an expensive divorce. Now he has to deal with these soft kids who would rather Uber than drive and his rebellious, free-thinking daughter, all while running his shop, manned by his unserious mechanics Stitch (Daryl “Chill” Mitchell) and Gabriel (Seann William Scott). How much can one man handle?

It’s all very predictable, designed for lowest common denominator humor and confirmation bias.

The kids (Barrett Margolis and Maxwell Simkins) act like “kids these days” with their screens and their made-up anxiety. Dennings’ Riley sounds like a teenager despite being in her 30s. Matt may be wrong about some things, but he always retains the moral high ground. This isn’t a man who is ready to learn anything new.

And the series even manages to make the joke (more than once!) that Riley and Matt are mistaken for a couple. You’ll shiver with disgust.

Ultimately, though, it doesn’t really matter how good or bad “Gears” is, because it’s a Tim Allen show. There are two camps of people: Those who like Allen and will follow him to any series that can string two sentences together; and those to whom he is an intense turnoff, and won’t bother sampling “Gears” even if it was an Emmy-winning triumph. I have to admit Allen is not my particular cup of tea, but some doses of the actor are fine, while others can be downright toxic. A “Santa Clause” TV show? Impossible to sit through. A middling sitcom? Sort of palatable.

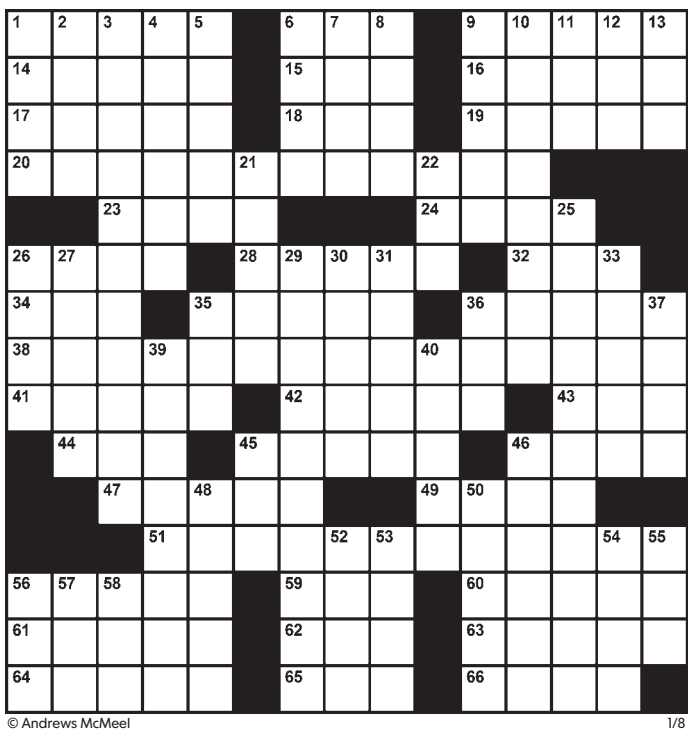
It hasn’t driven off a cliff. Yet.

Daryl “Chill” Mitchell, left, is Stitch and Seann William Scott is Gabriel, who work in Matt’s car shop in “Shifting Gears.” PROVIDED BY RAYMOND LIU/DISNEY

USA TODAY CROSSWORD

EDITED Amanda Rafkin
BY Brian Callahan

LEAGUE LEADERS



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ACROSS
1 "___ Crazy" (HBO docuseries about an ape owner)
6 Maple syrup source
9 Underground tomb
14 In the area
15 "Barbie" actor Simu
16 Sine or cosine, e.g.
17 Make happy
18 Electric guitar hookup
19 Opposite of obtuse
20 Romantic room on "The Bachelorette"
23 Get-together, informally
24 Salamander with toxic secretions
26 Place for a cruise ship
28 Place for a cruise ship
32 Ryan Murphy series with 12 seasons, for short
34 Poetic tribute
35 Opposites of unders
36 Radar dots
38 "It was unfamiliar to us at the time, but . . ."
41 Was audibly impressed
42 Stay away from
43 Indian state where deknni originated
44 Big ___ (Golden Arches burger)
45 Sports injury site
46 Yodeled or crooned
47 Brightly colored perennial
49 Pal
51 Small obstacle
56 Glass in a lab
59 Debtor's letters
60 Party game in which certain words are off-limits
61 Singer Mann
62 "All Things Considered" network
63 "Totes likely"
64 Some pharmacy workers, for short
65 Casual top
66 Hoagies

DOWN
1 Musical symbol
2 Spanish for "hello"
3 "Your point is taken"
4 Have significance
5 "Guilty" and "not guilty"
6 "You're crushing it!"
7 Intentions
8 ___ platter (Hawaiian appetizer)
9 Safe space for some dogs
10 Compete in a long-distance Olympic event
11 "And you?" in Spanish
12 Cherry discard
13 Tip of a boot
21 "When push comes to ___"
22 Airbnb alternative
25 Doohickey
26 Sport played on horseback
27 "Snug as a bug in a rug," e.g.
29 Amusement park in Sandusky, Ohio
30 "Wicked" actress Cynthia
31 "Same here"
33 Big ___ (cuddling position)
35 From a past era
36 Place to catch some Z's
37 Free goods at a merch table
39 Shawnee chief who resisted westward U.S. expansion
40 Flinch
45 Bee's knees spirit
46 Automaker with six stars in its logo
48 Enjoys
50 Encrypted URL opener
52 Tug-of-war need
53 "Why not"
54 Corn discards
55 Bout endings (Abbr.)
56 Nuts are high in it
57 Tell a whopper
58 "The Walking Dead" channel

Tuesday's Answer

S	C	A	R			A	P	N	E	A		W	E	B	S
A	A	R	P			S	E	A	M	S		E	X	I	T
F	R	O	M	T	H	E	T	O	P			L	P	G	A
E	D	U			D	E	L	E	T	E		D	E	M	I
T	I	N	T	S					E	N	D		D	A	N
Y	O	D	A			O	A	F	S			E	P	I	C	S
				R	H	O	D	E		G	N	A	T	S	
			A	M	A	Z	O	N	P	R	I	M	E		
		E	R	A	S	E			C	H	A	M	P		
E	L	E	C	T			P	E	D	S			E	M	I	R
B	E	A			E	S	O					G	R	A	C	E
B	A	C	K			A	L	I	C	I	A			D	E	C
I	N	O	N			W	I	D	O	W	S	P	E	A	K
N	O	D	E			E	C	O	L	I		H	U	G	O
G	R	E	W			D	Y	L	A	N		O	P	E	N

1/7

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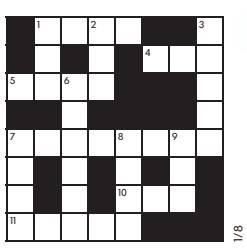
TXTPERT



1/8

Across
1. 7825
4. 627
5. 3673
7. 76748466
10. 738
11. 92737

Down
1. 776
2. 283
3. 27696
6. 767837
7. 7529
8. 8677
9. 688

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Today's theme
Sports

Use the phone keypad to decode the clues. For example: 2 could be A, B or C ... and 5678 could be LOST

1/7

Yesterday's solution

Numbers

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SUDOKU

Complete the grid so that every row, column and 3x3 box contains the numbers 1 through 9 (no repeats).

	9			4			3	2
5		8		7				
3	2		9				7	
9		2					4	1
1			4	9	8			3
8	4					9		6
	8				3		1	9
				8		3		5
4	3			1			8	

1/8 DIFFICULTY RATING ★★★☆☆

SUDOKU FUSION ON YOUR PHONE
puzzles.usatoday.com

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Complete the grid so that every row, column and 3x2 box contains the numbers 1 through 6 (no repeats).

			4		
4		2	5		6
	4		6	5	
	5	6		3	
3		1	2		5
		4			

DIFFICULTY RATING ★★★☆☆

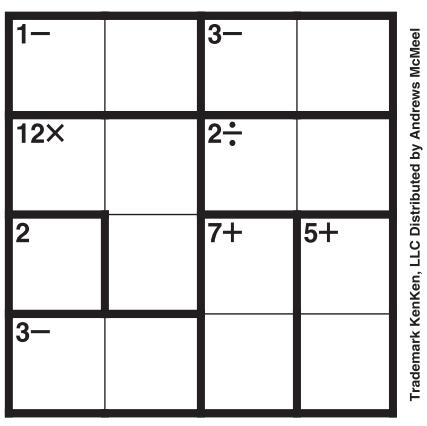
Tuesday's Answers

5	8	9	3	7	2	4	1	6
6	1	4	8	9	5	2	7	3
3	7	2	6	1	4	8	9	5
7	5	3	4	2	6	1	8	9
2	6	8	9	5	1	7	3	4
4	9	1	7	8	3	5	6	2
1	2	6	5	3	7	9	4	8
9	4	5	1	6	8	3	2	7
8	3	7	2	4	9	6	5	1

1	2	6	5	3	4
5	4	3	1	2	6
3	6	5	2	4	1
2	1	4	3	6	5
4	5	2	6	1	3
6	3	1	4	5	2

1/7

KENKEN



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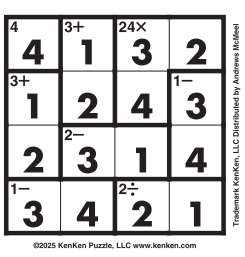
1. Each row and column must contain the numbers 1 through 4 (easy) or 1 though 6 (challenging) without repeating.

2. The numbers within the heavily outlined boxes, called cages, must combine using the given operation (in any order) to produce the target numbers in the top-left corners.

3. Freebies: fill in single-box cages with the number in the top-left corner.

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION



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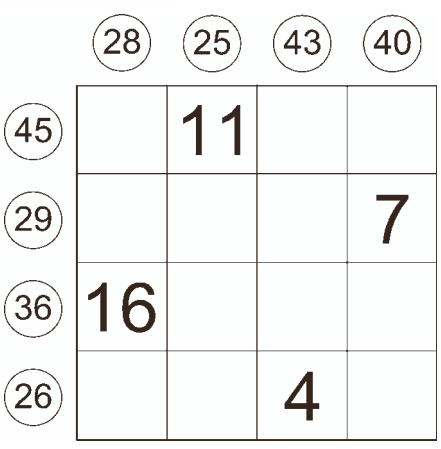
KUBOK 16

By Davide Coppo

Difficulty: **EXPERT**



Solution to Tuesday's puzzle

12	14	9	8
4	7	16	10
3	11	15	13
5	1	6	2

Enter the missing numbers from 1 to 16 without repetitions so that the sum of the four numbers in each row and column is the same as the corresponding circled number.

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Words

WORD ROUNDUP

By David L. Hoyt and Jeff Knurek 1/8

Find and Circle:
Nine words with OO in the middle ☑☐☐☐☐☐☐☐☐
Four four-letter metals ☐☐☐☐
Two five-letter bodies of water ☐☐
Two U.S. states ☐☐
Six-letter Greek god ☐

Tuesday's answer: UNIFORM COACH COURT TEAM HOOP GAME / APPLE PEACH MANGO GUAVA LEMON / LAOS IRAQ CHAD OMAN TOGO / EAST WEST / PACIFIC

W	A	H	Z	N	A	J	I	R	O	N	B
H	O	P	O	U	M	R	G	N	Z	R	O
H	O	O	O	L	T	N	I	O	L	T	O
G	L	O	L	L	A	A	N	Z	O	E	K
Z	O	T	K	E	L	O	H	F	O	D	T
I	O	L	C	Q	O	O	H	C	O	N	B
N	Z	O	D	S	L	E	A	D	V	O	A
C	R	W	M	Z	C	F	O	O	T	Q	D

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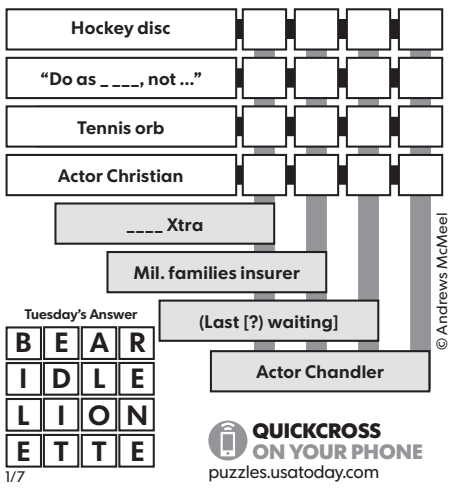
QUICKCROSS

By John Wilmes 1/8



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Tuesday's Answer

B	E	A	R
I	D	L	E
L	I	O	N
E	T	T	E

1/7

QUICKCROSS ON YOUR PHONE
puzzles.usatoday.com

UP & DOWN WORDS

By David L. Hoyt and Russell L. Hoyt 1/8

1. **PLAY** _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____ **OF** _____

Clues:
1. Protect the goal, e.g.
2. Lawyer for the accused
3. Chief legal officer
4. Average citizens
5. Famous person
6. Solve
7. ____ ____ bounds (not allowed)

Tuesday's Answer

HOT	WATER
WATER	MAIN
MAIN	STREET
STREET	HOCKEY
HOCKEY	STICK
STICK	TOGETHER
TOGETHER	AGAIN

PLAY ONLINE PUZZLES.USATODAY.COM

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DON'T QUOTE ME®

Playwright Lillian Hellman thinks about relationships.

Rearrange the words to complete the quote.
CHANGE FORGET OTHER PEOPLE TELL

"_____ _____ AND _____
TO ___ EACH _____."
1/8

Tuesday's Answer: "Childhood is that wonderful time of life when all you need to do to lose weight is to take a bath." - Rich Zera

©WIGGLES 3D GAMES

7 LITTLE WORDS

Find the 7 words to match the 7 clues. The numbers in parentheses represent the number of letters in each solution. Each letter combination can be used only once, but all letter combinations will be necessary to complete the puzzle.

CLUES	SOLUTIONS
1 it soothes a bruise (8)	_____
2 parts of an archipelago (5)	_____
3 quick to take offense (9)	_____
4 Peter Pan's creator (6)	_____
5 they may have their charms (9)	_____
6 high spirits (4)	_____
7 holly and hemlock, for two (10)	_____

BRA	SI	ENT	LIN	ES
IM	BAR	RG	TI	CEL
SEN	ETS	RIE	ISL	EE
GL	NS	EVE	REE	VE

Tuesday's Answers: 1. BADGERING 2. TARTANS 3. BROADCAST 4. STRINGS 5. ROSALYNN 6. COMBUSTING 7. EMPIRES 1/8

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JUMBLE®

THAT SCRAMBLED WORD GAME
By David L. Hoyt and Jeff Knurek

Unscramble these Jumbles, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.

VBEAO

HISSU

NFYLOD

FWEALF

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Now arrange the circled letters to form the surprise answer, as suggested by the above cartoon.

(Answers tomorrow)

Yesterday's Jumbles: ABIDE GUESS SHRIMP SWANKY
Answer: The young eagle was finally ready to leave the nest and — SPREAD HIS WINGS

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BONUS CROSSWORD

ACROSS
1 Con job
5 Cosmic payback
10 Mind-reader's gift
13 Marco —
14 Online messages
15 Rational
16 — — even keel
17 Wild West shooter
19 Pavilion
20 Mil. rank
21 Hotel employee
22 Concur
25 Card game
26 Went by boat
28 Additional
29 Musical composition
30 Unctuous
31 Water barrier
34 — corner
35 Inane
37 — libre (cocktail)
38 Forefoot
39 Pleat
40 Gave direction to
42 Sizable piece
43 Categorized
44 Dozen dozen
46 Comedian — Bruce
47 Solitary
48 California's Big —
49 Chopped food
53 Disco performer (2 wds.)
56 About (2 wds.)
57 At any time
58 Carried
59 Actor — Hemsworth
60 Harden
61 Sugary
62 Recently passed

DOWN
1 Blemish
2 Traffic barrier
3 Actor — Arkin
4 Treasure State native
5 Barrel
6 Diverted
7 Extent
8 Fine spray
9 "— in the Family"
10 Score in golf
11 Malicious look
12 Saucy
15 Boa
18 Off-white
23 "America's — Talent"
24 Thinks logically
25 Geometric figure
26 State of prolonged unconsciousness
27 Again
28 Thickness measure
29 Plant fluid
30 Ancient
31 Young fellow
32 Under covers
33 Loony
36 Kind
37 Local government (2 wds.)
39 Melted together
41 Coffee vessel
42 Veneration
43 Calm
44 Item for a catcher
45 Thesaurus name
46 Money
47 Gets older
48 Forecast word
50 — Minor
51 "On the double!"
52 Residence
54 Six-pack muscles
55 On a pension (Abbr.)

PREVIOUS PUZZLE SOLVED

H	E	A	D		H	A	S	H			L	O	S	S
O	S	S	A		I	L	I	A	D		E	P	E	E
L	A	I	R		M	A	D	R	E		G	E	N	T
D	U	A	N	E		R	E	S	T	R	I	C	T	S
			E	R	G			H	O	U	R			
S	A	R	D	I	N	E			U	T	O	P	I	A
C	U	E		N	U	M	B	E	R		N	E	S	S
A	R	T	S			I	O	N			S	A	S	H
D	A	R	E		S	T	A	V	E	S		S	U	E
S	L	O	P	P	Y			Y	A	N	K	E	E	S
			T	E	S	T			R	U	N			
V	O	L	U	N	T	E	E	R		B	O	M	B	E
A	T	O	P		E	X	P	E	L		L	E	A	K
I	T	A	L		M	A	I	N	E		L	A	K	E
N	O	N	E			S	C	O	T		S	L	E	D

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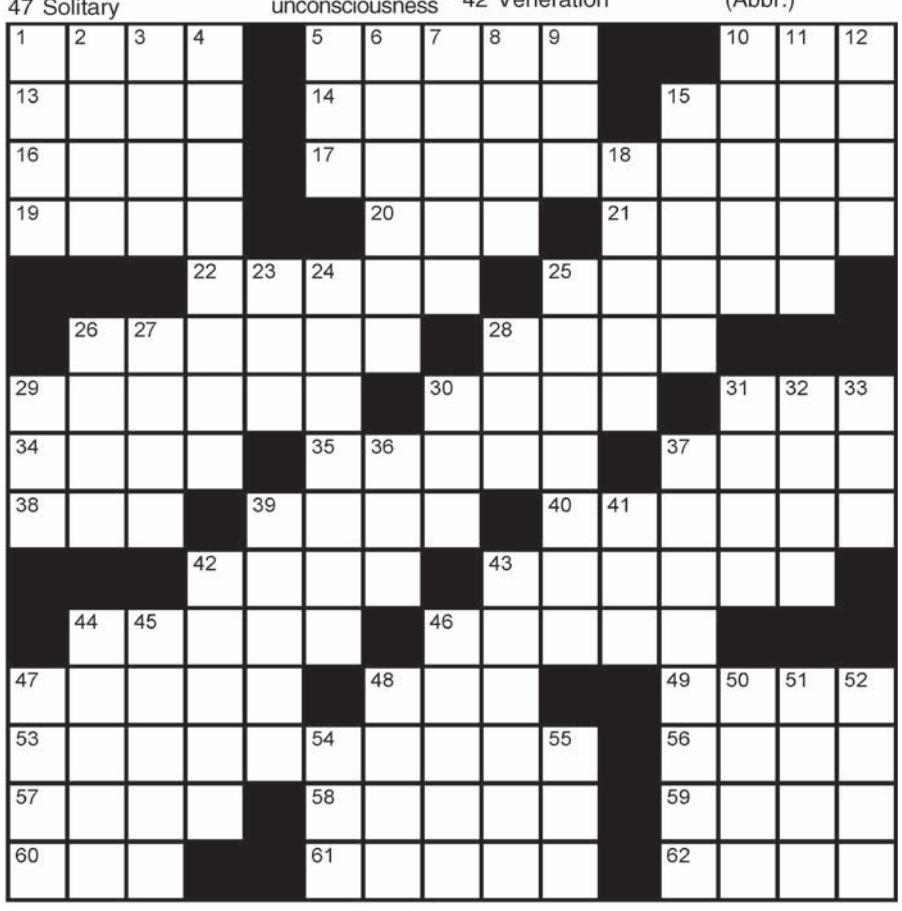

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STAGE

Audiences will fall for the stage magic in 'Death Becomes Her'

Patrick Ryan USA TODAY

Jennifer Simard, left, and Christopher Sieber in "Death Becomes Her." PROVIDED BY MATTHEW MURPHY AND EVAN ZIMMERMAN

Severed noggins, staircase tumbles and gaping stomach wounds.

With all the onstage magic happening in "Death Becomes Her," it's enough to make your head spin. Adapted from the 1992 camp classic starring Meryl Streep and Goldie Hawn, the lavish new Broadway musical serves up irreverent comedy with dumbfounding feats of theatrical sorcery.

The show tells the story of caustic best frenemies Madeline (Megan Hilty) and Helen (Jennifer Simard), who ingest a purple potion from a mysterious socialite (Michelle Williams) that gives them eternal youth. But the transformative elixir has unsavory side effects: Even the slightest knock to their va-va-voom figures causes irreparable blemishes. So when the gloves come off and the ladies brawl, all manner of absurd body horror ensues.

The movie won an Oscar for its outrageous visual effects. So naturally, illusionist Tim Clothier was daunted when he got the call about helping bring "Death Becomes Her" to the New York stage (taking the mantle from Rob Lake, who oversaw the effects for the show's Chicago tryout early last year).

"I knew the movie and thought, 'Gosh, there's going to be some very tricky bits to work out,' " says Clothier, whose past credits include Cirque du Soleil and Blue Man Group. "It's not a spectacle in Vegas where the magic takes center stage – here, the magic needs to drive the story. So we really had to pull from our box of tricks. From a historical perspective, there are references to classic things that magicians would normally do, as well as some groundbreaking things we developed that no one's really tried before."

'Death Becomes Her' pulls off a jaw-dropping staircase scene

The show's action centerpiece, if you will, is the Act 1 finale. In a heated confrontation with Helen and Ernest (Christopher Sieber), the shlubby object of both their affections, Madeline is pushed down a mansion staircase, crunching her bones and mangling her limbs all the way down.

The slow-motion plunge is one of the movie's iconic images, and director/choreographer Christopher Gattelli ("Newsies") racked his brain for months about how to bring that to life on stage.

"We literally tried everything: puppets, throwing dolls downstairs, exercise balls with wigs on them. We thought maybe we could build a robot," Gattelli recalls with a laugh. "Nothing felt right."

But he eventually cracked the code when he met actor/dancer Warren Yang, an Olympic-trained gymnast who now serves as the production's acrobatics captain.

"I was on Instagram and I saw a video of Warren literally changing his clothes while he was doing a handstand," Gattelli says. "I was like, 'Wait a minute.' I reached out to him and was like, 'I can see a world where there's a pommel horse routine down a flight of stairs.' And he was like, 'Oh, I'm all in – let's play.' "

Gattelli calls the sequence a "true collaborative effort," working with lighting designer Justin Townsend ("Moulin Rouge! The Musical") and costume designer Paul Tazewell ("Wicked") to cleverly achieve the illusion that it's actually Hilty and not Yang toppling down the stairs. He also had to find other dancers with that particular skill set, should Yang ever need to call out of a performance.

"It's an epic moment that everyone is waiting for and I was just thrilled where it landed," Gattelli says. "Warren stops the show every night with it. There are no wires – he's literally doing these handstands and cartwheels and flips. It's a total free fall and I just cannot believe he can do that."

The show's neck-twisting illusions are old-school 'theatrical magic'

From there, the musical's optical illusions only get wilder: Madeline has her head knocked off during a shovel-wielding showdown, with the help of stunt doubles and props including an eye-tricking serving cart. She also blows a hole through Helen's stomach with a shotgun. Of course, unlike the movie, audiences cannot see directly through Simard's torso, which instead billows smoke throughout Act 2.

"I can't share the secrets because then I would have to kill you," Clothier says slyly. "But there were many different iterations of that throughout development."

The moment, too, when an arrow flies through Helen's belly is based on a "classic magic effect from the 1890s. We had to find visual ways to tell the story of someone who's had a hole blown through their stomach, and that was one of those."

The image of Madeline's head doing a full 360 is also "just good old-fashioned theatrical magic," Gattelli adds. "If you really look at it, it's not hard to tell how it happens. But if the audience is on the ride, it's OK if you see a little bit of how the sausage is made. It's happening live right in front of you, and it's satisfying that the audience eats it up the way they do."

Gattelli is quick to note that it takes "dozens of people" to pull off these illusions eight shows a week. An hour before each performance, various cast and crew members are behind the curtain running through each and every stunt to ensure they're safe.

"No one takes anything for granted," Gattelli says. "It really frees everyone up, so when they do the show, they can feel confident and breathe and be funny. It helps them let loose and give those amazing performances – and that's always the goal."

"Death Becomes Her" is now playing at the Lunt-Fontanne Theatre (205 W 46th St.).

TV PREVIEW

Fox's 'Doc' is a drama to forget

Kelly Lawler USA TODAY

Molly Parker stars as Dr. Amy Larsen in "Doc." PROVIDED BY PETER H. STRANKS/FOX

Not long into watching Fox's new amnesia drama "Doc," I had a desperate desire to turn the TV off.

There are certainly worse TV series than "Doc" (Tuesdays, 9 EST/PST, ★½☆☆), which follows Dr. Amy Larsen (Molly Parker), a callous medical professional who loses eight years of her memory after a traumatic brain injury. There are series with lazy writing, shallow characters, boring plots and even offensive elements. But the sin of this particular series is one that's hard to get over: deep unpleasantness.

"Doc" is, as the kids might say, "cringe." It's awkward, unenjoyable and irritating. At times it's actively depressing, and not what I would classify as "entertainment."

In spite of the efforts of creator Barbie Kingman ("Magnum, PI"), Parker and the rest of the cast, "Doc" never coalesces into a coherent and functional TV show. It flatlines from its first few moments.

Amy is every stereotype TV has ever developed about an unfeeling doctor who is brilliant but lacks bedside manner. Her patients hate hanging out with her, but she gets *results*, gosh darn it. She's chief of internal medicine at a Minneapolis hospital where she annoys her ex-husband and hospital administrator Michael (Omar Metwally), stands in the way of ambitious hack Dr. Richard Miller (Scott Wolf) and makes time for discreet rendezvous with young hunk Dr. Jake Eller (Jon-Michael Ecker).

But all of that is thrown into chaos when Amy is in a car accident that leaves her with a traumatic brain injury. When she wakes up from surgery she thinks that it's 2016 and that she's married to Michael. She also thinks her daughter is 9 and her son is alive, and she is hit with major grief to learn her daughter is 17 and her son died seven years ago. Oh, and she's a much nicer person without those eight years, too.

The concept, based on an Italian series, has potential. But "Doc" never does anything interesting with the plot. It's all reduced to simplistic binaries. Amnesia Amy is good, present-day Amy is bad. Amy is a medical genius and the rest of the doctors are pale imitations. Amy loves her ex-husband, who has moved on. Amy's new fling can't tell her they were together because of office politics. It's all rather tedious.

And ultimately it's uncomfortable, and not in the good way. Amy's every interaction is loaded with dramatic irony, but the audience isn't in a good spot knowing that her teenage daughter actually hates her or that the new chief of internal medicine is a quack who killed a patient. We're just kind of stressed out by it.

It's a shame, because Parker is a first-rate actress with great credits including "Deadwood" and "House of Cards." She is almost enough of a talent to build this creaky show around, but not quite.

The series can't decide if it cares more about Amy's amnesia and personal relationships or the case-of-the-week medical drama.

Each episode is heavily unbalanced and poorly paced.

Watching TV shouldn't feel like this much work. I'd rather forget all about it.

USA TODAY
Wine Club

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NATION&WORLD EXTRA

INSIDE
UAE in talks on role in post-war Gaza. 5NN

A family member touches the flag-draped casket of former U.S. President Jimmy Carter as he lies in state in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda on Tuesday in Washington, D.C. GETTY IMAGES

Leaders pay tribute to Jimmy Carter

Former president will lie in state at US Capitol

Andy Sullivan and Richard Cowan
REUTERS

WASHINGTON - U.S. leaders on Tuesday paid tribute to former President Jimmy Carter – who had the longest and most admired post-presidency in history – as he laid in state at the U.S. Capitol on Tuesday ahead of his funeral on Thursday.

Members of Congress and several Supreme Court justices gathered around Carter's flag-draped coffin under the Capitol dome. Several praised Carter's actions as the 39th president and the humanitarian work he pursued for decades after leaving office in 1981.

"Jimmy Carter was an all too rare example of a gifted man who also walked with humility, modesty and grace," said Vice President Kamala Harris, who belongs to the Democratic Party as Carter did.

Republicans John Thune, Senate leader, and Mike Johnson, House of Representatives speaker, also spoke as Carter family members and other lawmakers observed. Among them were Democratic senators

See CARTER, Page 7NN

Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer, left, and Senate Majority Leader John Thune, right, present a wreath during a ceremony honoring the late former US President Jimmy Carter in the Rotunda of the US Capitol, where he will lie in state, in Washington, D.C., on Tuesday. Carter died at the age of 100 on Dec. 29, 2024 at his home in Plains, Ga. THE WASHINGTON POST/AFP VIA GETTY IMAGES

Hamas demands end to Gaza war under hostage deal

James Mackenzie and Nidal al-Mughrabi
REUTERS

JERUSALEM – Hamas stood by its demand on Tuesday that Israel fully end its assault on Gaza under any deal to release hostages, and said U.S. President-elect Donald Trump was rash to say there would be "hell to pay" unless they go free by his Jan. 20 inauguration.

Officials from the Islamist group and Israel have been holding talks with Qatari and Egyptian mediators in the most intensive effort for months to reach a ceasefire in Gaza.

The outgoing U.S. administration has called for a final push for a deal before Joe Biden leaves office, and many in the region now view Trump's inauguration as an unofficial deadline.

But with the clock ticking, both sides accuse the other of blocking a deal by adhering to conditions that torpedoed all previous peace efforts for more than a year.

Hamas says it will free its remaining hostages only if Israel agrees to end the war and withdraw all its troops from Gaza. Israel says it will not end

See HOSTAGES, Page 7NN

Trump won't rule out force to take Panama Canal, Greenland

Steve Holland and Joseph Ax
REUTERS

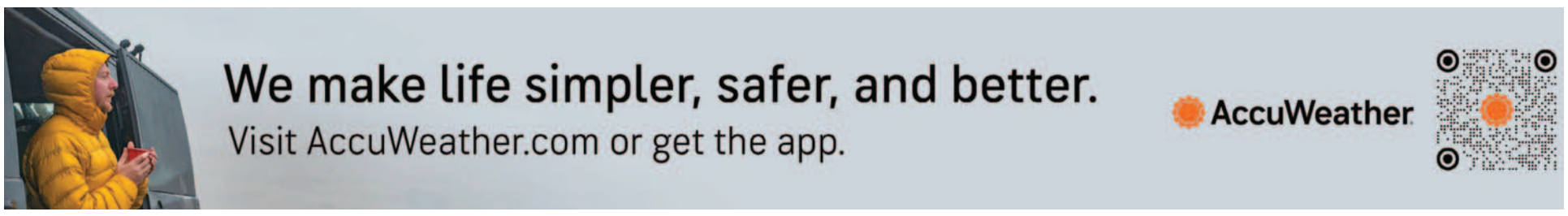
PALM BEACH, Fla. – President-elect Donald Trump refused on Tuesday to rule out using military or economic action to pursue acquisition of the Panama Canal and Greenland, part of a broader expansionist agenda he has promoted since winning the Nov. 5 election.

Trump, who takes office on Jan. 20, also floated the idea of turning Canada into a U.S. state, said he would demand far higher defense spending from NATO allies and promised to change the name of the Gulf of Mexico to the Gulf of America.

Still two weeks away from taking office, Trump has begun outlining an aggressive foreign policy with little regard to diplomatic considerations or the concerns of U.S. allies.

Asked at a news conference at his Florida resort whether he could assure the world he would not use military or economic coercion as he tries to gain control of the Panama Canal and Greenland, Trump said, "No, I can't assure you on either of those two. But I can say this,

See TRUMP, Page 6NN

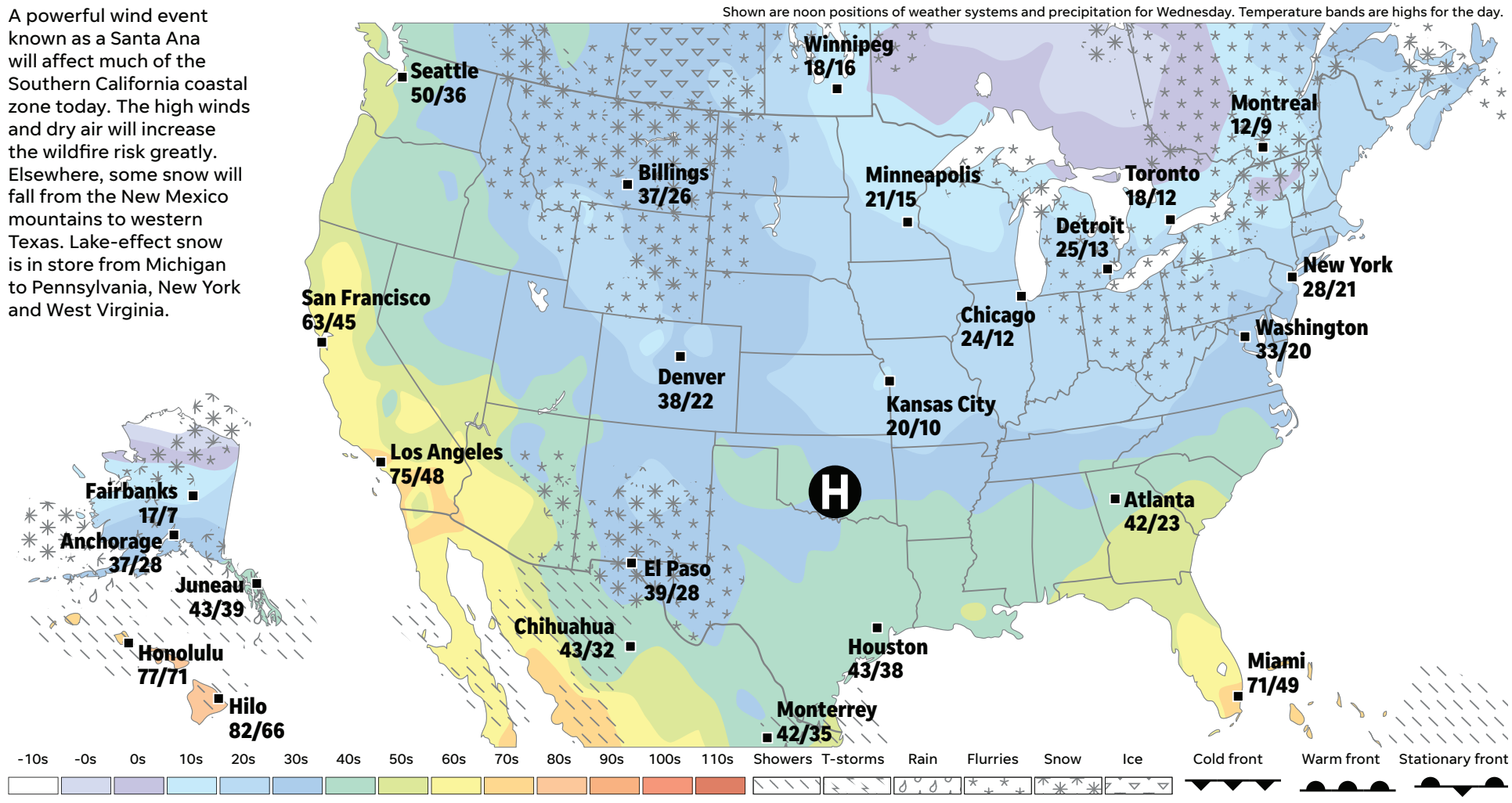


NATIONAL SUMMARY

A powerful wind event known as a Santa Ana will affect much of the Southern California coastal zone today. The high winds and dry air will increase the wildfire risk greatly. Elsewhere, some snow will fall from the New Mexico mountains to western Texas. Lake-effect snow is in store from Michigan to Pennsylvania, New York and West Virginia.

In the digital e-edition, you can click anywhere on the US map to get up-to-date forecasts, radar, MinuteCast® and more.

Shown are noon positions of weather systems and precipitation for Wednesday. Temperature bands are highs for the day.



TUESDAY EXTREMES

NATIONAL (for the 48 contiguous states)

High: **79** at Oceanside, CA
Low: **-22** at Kabetogama, MN
Precip: **0.21"** at Limon, CO

INTERNATIONAL (excludes Antarctica)

High: **111** at Urandangi, Australia
Low: **-49** at Oymyakon, Russia
Precip: **3.86"** at Vogel, Slovenia

TODAY IN HISTORY

The temperature stayed below zero in New York City for an entire day only once--on Jan. 8, 1859. During the same cold snap, Toronto had its lowest January temperature ever with a low of 27 degrees below zero on Jan. 10.

WEATHER TRIVIA™

Q: What name is given to a storm that tracks up the East Coast of the U.S.?

A: Nor'easter

NATIONAL CITIES WEDNESDAY

● Denotes possible travel delays

	High/low/W	Air Quality
Aberdeen, SD	25/18/pc	22
Abilene, TX	40/30/c	38
● Accomac, VA	33/20/c	38
Adrian, MI	28/16/sf	38
● Akron, OH	21/13/sf	39
Alamogordo, NM	41/26/sn	57
● Alexandria, VA	32/17/pc	53
● Alliance, OH	22/10/sf	43
Amarillo, TX	41/26/s	35
Ames, IA	23/12/pc	45
● Anderson, SC	48/21/s	32
Appleton, WI	21/10/s	51
● Asheville, NC	34/17/s	36
● Ashland, OH	23/12/sf	47
Athens, GA	46/23/s	28
Augusta, GA	51/22/s	33
Austin, TX	45/36/pc	43
Bartlesville, OK	33/18/s	44
● Battle Creek, MI	26/16/sf	30
Bedford, IN	23/0/pc	50
● Binghamton, NY	13/10/sf	30
● Bluffton, SC	53/30/s	30
Bremerton, WA	48/36/pc	50
● Brockton, MA	28/17/s	45
Brownwood, TX	43/30/c	42
Burlington, IA	23/11/pc	52
Burlington, NC	39/19/s	33
● Burlington, VT	14/11/sn	26
● Cambridge, OH	27/14/sf	37
Camdenton, MO	28/12/s	52
● Canandaigua, NY	18/14/sn	29
● Canton, OH	22/12/sf	47
● Carlsbad, NM	35/23/sf	82
Chambersburg, PA	28/15/c	33
● Cherry Hill, NJ	31/17/s	54
Cincinnati, OH	23/4/pc	47
Clarksville, TN	31/17/s	40
● Coldwater, MI	26/16/sf	33
Columbus, OH	24/12/sf	42
● Corning, NY	20/13/sf	33
Corpus Christi, TX	44/41/c	32
Daytona Beach, FL	58/36/s	44
● Deming, NM	41/25/sn	50
DeRidder, LA	48/28/s	33
Des Moines, IA	23/13/pc	46
Detroit, MI	25/13/sf	53
Devils Lake, ND	26/22/pc	26
● Dover, NH	21/13/s	45
El Paso, TX	39/28/sn	115
● Elmira, NY	21/14/sf	32
● Erie, PA	25/20/sf	32
Eugene, OR	50/34/pc	48
Evansville, IN	25/1/s	51
● Fall River, MA	29/17/s	51
Farmington, NM	42/17/pc	51
Fayetteville, NC	44/24/s	42
Fond du Lac, WI	21/8/s	52
Fort Myers, FL	66/43/s	36
Fort Smith, AR	36/19/pc	48
● Framingham, MA	28/16/s	43
Freeport, IL	24/12/pc	54
● Fremont, OH	28/17/sf	43
● Fort Collins, CO	35/23/s	51
Gadsden, AL	39/18/s	33
Gainesville, FL	56/31/s	45
Galesburg, IL	22/11/pc	55
Gastonia, NC	44/19/s	42
Glen Rose, TX	43/28/pc	51
Gonzales, LA	49/29/s	38
Great Falls, MT	38/24/sn	42
Green Bay, WI	21/9/s	50
Greenville, SC	45/21/s	39
● Hackensack, NJ	28/20/s	52
Hagerstown, MD	29/17/c	35
Hattiesburg, MS	49/24/s	35
Henderson, KY	23/-3/s	52
● Hendersonville, NC	36/17/s	37
● Herkimer, NY	16/10/sn	37
Hillsdale, MI	25/15/sf	34
● Holland, MI	26/19/sn	32
● Hornell, NY	19/11/sf	27
Houma, LA	49/31/s	32
Howell, MI	23/10/sf	38
Hutchinson, KS	25/16/s	43
● Hyannis, MA	29/16/s	38
Indianapolis, IN	22/3/pc	51
Iowa City, IA	22/10/pc	51
● Ithaca, NY	15/12/sf	30
Jackson, MS	45/23/s	44
Jackson, TN	35/18/s	41
Jacksonville, FL	57/29/s	34
Jacksonville, NC	43/23/s	39
● Kent, OH	22/11/sf	49
Kewanee, IL	26/12/pc	62
● Keyser, WV	27/16/c	42
Kinston, NC	42/22/s	38
Knoxville, TN	32/18/pc	41
Lafayette, IN	22/7/pc	49
Lafayette, LA	49/30/s	31
Lakeland, FL	61/38/s	50
Lansing, MI	23/11/sf	43
Las Cruces, NM	40/27/sn	94
● Lebanon, PA	28/18/pc	37
Leesburg, FL	59/36/s	37
● Levittown, PA	31/17/s	52
Lincoln, IL	25/6/pc	52
Louisville, KY	27/6/pc	53
Lubbock, TX	39/29/c	40
Manitowoc, WI	21/10/s	51
● Mansfield, OH	22/13/sf	37
Marshall, NC	29/13/pc	33
Marshfield, WI	18/7/s	43
● Massillon, OH	23/11/sf	49
● McLean, VA	31/16/pc	48
Melbourne, FL	63/38/s	29
Memphis, TN	35/22/s	51
● Middletown, NY	21/15/pc	43
● Milford, MA	26/14/s	45
Milwaukee, WI	24/13/pc	77
Monroe, MI	27/15/sf	43
Monroe, LA	46/25/s	41
Montgomery, AL	47/21/s	34
Muncie, IN	23/6/c	47
Murfreesboro, TN	34/16/s	45
Naples, FL	66/45/s	32
Nashville, TN	34/18/s	45
● Neptune, NJ	31/19/s	50
● New Bedford, MA	30/17/s	43
New Bern, NC	43/24/s	36
● New Philadelphia, OH	24/12/sf	45
Newark, OH	26/12/sf	47
● Newton, NJ	25/16/pc	47
● New York, NY	28/21/s	54
● Norwich, CT	28/15/s	44
Ocala, FL	58/31/s	37
Oklahoma City, OK	38/24/s	41
Opelousas, LA	45/28/s	36
Oshkosh, WI	20/9/s	51
Palm Beach, FL	69/47/s	35
● Palm Springs, CA	72/47/s	100
Panama City, FL	52/32/s	22
Pekin, IL	27/12/pc	58
Pensacola, FL	50/30/s	42
Peoria, IL	25/12/pc	57
Petersburg, VA	37/18/c	45
Phoenix, AZ	69/43/s	103
Port Huron, MI	22/9/sf	29
● Portsmouth, NH	23/15/s	38
● Poughkeepsie, NY	27/18/pc	40
● Providence, RI	28/15/s	47
Pueblo, CO	34/11/s	50
● Quincy, MA	29/17/s	51
Redding, CA	71/52/s	53
Reno, NV	46/23/pc	57
● Ravenna, OH	22/9/sf	46
● Richmond, IN	22/1/c	48
● Rochester, NY	20/15/sf	26
Rockford, IL	23/12/pc	51
Ruidoso, NM	34/21/sf	71
Salem, OR	53/33/pc	50
Salina, KS	24/16/s	43
Salinas, CA	66/39/s	51
Salisbury, MD	32/17/pc	39
● San Angelo, TX	41/30/c	26
Sarasota, FL	61/44/s	41
Savannah, GA	54/27/s	44
Sheboygan, WI	21/12/s	51
Shelby, NC	43/18/s	41
Sherman, TX	41/28/s	51
Shreveport, LA	46/26/s	41
Silver City, NM	38/23/sf	53
Sioux Falls, SD	27/18/pc	35
● Somerset, PA	18/9/sf	41
● Somerville, NJ	30/18/s	50
● South Bend, IN	27/16/sf	38
Spartanburg, SC	44/22/s	41
Springfield, IL	22/6/pc	49
Springfield, MO	25/13/s	47
St. Augustine, FL	56/35/s	35
St. Cloud, MN	20/13/c	41
St. George, UT	52/28/pc	54
● Staunton, VA	30/12/pc	33
Stevens Point, WI	19/7/s	50
Stockton, CA	61/36/s	54
● Stroudsburg, PA	24/14/pc	48
Stuart, FL	67/44/s	34
● Sturgis, MI	26/17/sn	32
Tallahassee, FL	55/29/s	22
Thibodaux, LA	48/30/s	39
Topeka, KS	20/11/s	52
Tuscaloosa, AL	43/20/s	35
● Utica, NY	15/10/sn	29
Ventura, CA	67/45/s	52
● Victorville, CA	59/21/s	56
● Vineland, NJ	31/15/s	51
Visalia, CA	60/33/s	61
● Washington, DC	33/20/pc	49
Watertown, SD	25/16/c	33
Wausau, WI	18/6/s	43
● Waynesboro, PA	28/14/c	34
● White Plains, NY	27/19/s	44
Wichita Falls, TX	41/29/s	38
● Wilmington, DE	32/17/pc	53
Wilmington, NC	47/24/s	46
Wisconsin Rapids, WI	19/7/s	50
● Wooster, OH	23/13/sf	36
● Worcester, MA	22/12/s	43
● York, PA	29/17/pc	35

Air Quality Index: 0-50, Good; 51-100, Moderate; 101-150, Unhealthy for sensitive groups; 151-200, Unhealthy; 201-300, Very unhealthy; 301-500, Hazardous

INTERNATIONAL CITIES

	Wednesday High/low/W	Thursday High/low/W
Acapulco	87/70/s	87/71/pc
Addis Ababa	75/50/s	76/51/pc
Algiers	69/48/s	71/50/s
Amman	58/41/pc	59/41/pc
Amsterdam	42/33/pc	41/36/pc
Ankara	51/29/pc	53/28/pc
Asuncion	100/67/s	100/70/s
Athens	63/51/c	64/49/pc
● Auckland	75/60/c	75/59/s
Baghdad	69/44/pc	69/42/pc
Bangkok	92/69/s	92/70/s
Beijing	36/17/s	37/13/s
Beirut	68/55/pc	68/54/pc
Belgrade	63/43/s	61/46/pc
Berlin	40/31/pc	37/32/c
● Bogota	69/50/r	68/51/r
● Brussels	39/31/sh	37/29/pc
Bucharest	57/37/s	58/37/s
Budapest	51/40/pc	55/38/c
Buenos Aires	84/71/s	86/73/s
Cairo	71/51/pc	72/56/pc
Cape Town	78/60/pc	77/64/pc
Caracas	87/73/pc	87/74/pc
Casablanca	73/42/pc	73/42/s
Colombo	86/75/pc	86/76/sh
● Copenhagen	42/36/pc	39/33/pc
Damascus	58/32/s	60/35/pc
Dublin	36/27/pc	36/25/s
● Geneva	54/45/r	50/36/r
● Guatemala City	75/59/sh	73/56/pc
Hanoi	72/61/c	70/56/c
● Harare	78/63/t	76/64/t
Havana	70/60/c	69/50/pc
Helsinki	38/34/c	37/32/sn
Hong Kong	68/59/c	68/53/c
● Jakarta	86/75/t	85/76/r
Jerusalem	60/47/pc	61/44/pc
● Johannesburg	77/60/t	72/60/t
Kabul	37/14/s	35/17/s
Khartoum	87/63/pc	88/62/s
● Kyiv	44/33/c	40/36/pc
Kingston	89/73/pc	87/73/s
La Paz	51/42/r	53/42/r
Lagos	92/77/s	91/77/s
Lima	76/67/c	77/66/c
Lisbon	63/54/sh	64/56/pc
● London	37/29/c	38/26/s
● Madrid	52/48/r	59/43/c
Manila	88/76/c	86/74/c
Mexico City	69/46/pc	70/52/c
● Milan	46/42/pc	50/39/pc
Mombasa	92/75/pc	91/76/sh
Montevideo	80/61/s	82/62/s
● Montreal	12/9/sf	20/14/sn
● Moscow	40/31/r	34/31/c
Nairobi	83/61/s	81/61/t
New Delhi	66/44/pc	67/43/pc
Panama City	89/73/r	90/72/c
● Paris	53/44/r	49/33/sh
Port-au-Prince	89/69/s	88/66/s
Rio de Janeiro	81/73/r	79/72/t
Riyadh	65/44/pc	66/44/pc
Rome	60/52/c	62/51/pc
San Jose	80/68/sh	81/65/sh
San Salvador	88/64/s	86/61/c
Santiago	87/57/s	91/59/s
● Sao Paulo	78/65/r	75/64/r
● Sarajevo	54/40/pc	54/41/c
Shanghai	54/31/c	43/28/pc
Singapore	90/78/pc	88/77/pc
● Stockholm	34/23/sn	28/23/pc
● Sydney	72/66/sh	76/70/sh
Taipei	69/58/pc	60/51/c
● Tegucigalpa	78/65/pc	77/59/c
Tehran	51/38/r	54/39/s
Tokyo	53/40/s	55/35/s
Toronto	18/12/c	24/14/pc
Tunis	65/44/s	68/54/pc
Vancouver	47/35/pc	48/40/pc
Vienna	45/35/pc	45/35/pc
Warsaw	39/29/pc	44/34/r
Yerevan	38/23/pc	40/23/pc
Zagreb	53/44/c	57/35/c
● Zurich	53/41/sn	52/31/r

● Denotes possible travel delays Wednesday

Weather(W): **s**-sunny, **pc**-partly cloudy, **c**-cloudy, **sh**-showers, **t**-thunderstorms, **r**-rain, **sf**-snow flurries, **sn**-snow, **i**-ice.

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GLOBALPOST NEWS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

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INDONESIA

Yes, we can

Indonesia's new government kicked off the first free meal program for children and pregnant women Monday, hoping to fight malnutrition in the county, with economists stressing fiscal concern for the multi-billion-dollar project, according to the Associated Press.

The Free Nutritious Meal program was the election campaign centerpiece promise of President Prabowo Subianto, who was elected last year. The program is expected to feed nearly 90 million children and women, costing around $28 billion by the end of Subianto's term in 2029.

The government and military, who will prepare and distribute the meals, have been running pilot programs in the country.

The first part of the scheme was rolled out this week on a small scale, with just 90 kitchens involved in preparing the first meals in more than 20 provinces, officials said, according to Al Jazeera. At an elementary school in West Jakarta, students were given food trays of rice, fried chicken, fried tofu, beans, and an orange in class on Monday morning.

Indonesia is home to more than 282 million people and is Southeast Asia's largest economy.

Subianto said that the program aims to fight the stunting of growth that afflicts 21.5 percent of Indonesian children younger than five and would raise the income of farmers, reported the wire.

But the policy has sparked concern among some economists who believe it could dent Indonesia's hard-won reputation for fiscal prudence. Some investors and analysts warned about the scale of its logistics, as well as its burden on the economy and state finances.

Nailul Huda, a researcher at the Center of Economic and Law Studies, told the AP that the food program will lead to additional national debt and that the nation's state finances are not strong enough to support it.

CHAD

The emperor's new clothes

French troops will soon complete their exit from Chad, their last foreign deployment in the Sahel region, ending what some interpreted as colonial meddling in the West African country, if not a tilt toward instability.

President Mahamat Déby has chosen to turn his attention diplomatically from the country's former colonial master and instead foster closer relations with Russia, Turkey, and other countries, wrote Deutsche Welle. He is also taking a big risk saying goodbye to a rich and powerful, democratic partner in favor of countries that are facing significant problems in their own neighborhoods, however.

French fighter jets, for example, have frequently stopped rebels from reaching the capital of N'Djamena. "French policymakers have long viewed their presence in Chad as a fundamentally stabilizing element in a broadly unstable region," wrote World Politics Review. "Explicitly or not, this view has been shared by successive Chadian regimes."

The move was arguably one of the most significant since Déby took office three years ago after the death of his father, Idriss Déby, who served as Chad's president from 1996 to 2021, when rebels killed him in northern Chad.

The military installed the younger Déby in office, then organized an election in May that aimed to legitimize his rule but came under criticism for election irregularities, Agence France-Presse reported.

Legislative elections in late December, meanwhile, cemented Déby's hold on power. Opposition figures boycotted the vote, saying they did not offer people a real choice. Some political dissidents called for voters to remain home in order to avoid potential violence that many feared might flare up, Voice of America added.

But some Chadians casting ballots were hopeful Déby and his allies were at least holding a vote and giving people the chance to make their voice heard.

"This is the first time that I am voting for three candidates at the same time – for the legislative, provincial, and municipal elections," Moussa Ali Hissein, 27, told Reuters. "I hope that these candidates will keep their promises to young people. I especially need a job."

Almost 45 percent of Chad's people are impoverished, according to the World Bank.

DISCOVERIES

The comeback

In California's Elkhorn Slough, a furry ally has emerged in the fight against one of the West Coast's most notorious invasive species: European green crabs.

A new study found that these destructive crustaceans – once abundant in the tidal estuary – are now on the decline thanks to the big appetites of southern sea otters.

European green crabs (Carcinus maenas), introduced to North America in the 1800s, are notorious for destroying eelgrass beds, preying on juvenile salmon, and disrupting coastal ecosystems.

They've spread along the Pacific Coast since the 1980s, becoming one of the most invasive species in marine environments, explained Smithsonian Magazine.

Southern sea otters (Enhydra lutris nereis), on the other hand, were nearly hunted to extinction by the early 1900s for their thick fur. Conservation efforts and federal protections have helped their population rebound to around 3,000 individuals, including a thriving group of 120 at Elkhorn Slough.

Known for their insatiable appetites – they consume up to 25 percent of their body weight daily – these otters have turned green crabs into a main course.

"The otters are a just super voracious predator," co-author Kerstin Wasson told USA Today. "We calculated that the current otter population here eats somewhere between 50,000 and 120,000 green crabs a year."

Wasson and her team added that the mammals' impact has been transformative.

At the height of the green crab invasion in the early 2000s, traps often yielded 100 crabs. Today, traps rarely catch more than 10.

"I've studied green crabs in estuaries on three coasts and two continents for decades, and this is one of the first pieces of good news we've gotten," ecologist and co-author Rikke Jeppesen said in a statement.

Finland recovers anchor in Baltic investigation

Ship held on suspicion it caused cable damage

Louise Rasmussen and Anne Kauranen
REUTERS

COPENHAGEN, Denmark – Finnish police said on Tuesday they had recovered a lost anchor from the seabed as part of an investigation of suspected sabotage against power and internet cables in the Baltic Sea.

Finland last month seized the Eagle S tanker carrying Russian oil on suspicion the vessel had damaged the Finnish-Estonian Estlink 2 power line and four telecom cables by dragging its anchor across the seabed.

"The location where the anchor was found is along the route of the Eagle S ... towards the western end of the drag trace found on the seabed," Finland's National Bureau of Investigation said in a statement.

Finnish lawyer Herman Ljungberg, who represents the ship's owner, United Arab Emirates-based Caravella LLC FZ, said the alleged damage happened outside of Finland's territorial waters and that the country thus lacked jurisdiction to intervene.

Ljungberg has previously said Finland hijacked the vessel at sea and should release it, a request that was denied by a court last week.

Members of the Eagle S crew are suspected of sabotage and damage to property, and may also face criminal liability along with the ship's owner for the disruption of telecommunications, Finland's Deputy Prosecutor General Jukka Rappe told Reuters.

Finnish police have said they ordered a travel ban for eight crew members as part of the investigation.

Finland's customs service has said it believes the Eagle S is part of a shadow fleet of tankers used to circumvent sanctions on Russian oil, and has impounded its cargo.

Moscow has said Finland's seizure of the ship is not a matter for Russia.

Photos of the Eagle S taken since the incident show the vessel is missing its port side anchor.

A crew works near the presumed anchor of the Eagle S tanker on the deck of HMS Belos, off Porkkalanniemi, Finland. POLICE OF FINLAND/LEHTIKUVA VIA REUTERS

Baltic Sea nations are on high alert after a string of power cable, telecom link and gas pipeline outages since Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022. The NATO military alliance has said it will boost its presence in the region.

The anchor was recovered from the seabed with the help of Finland's border guard and defense forces as well as the Swedish navy, the police said.

"It will contribute to the progress of the criminal investigation, and it is now subject to forensic analysis," NBI Detective Superintendent Risto Lohi said in its statement.

In a similar operation, Finland in 2023 recovered an anchor it said belonged to a Chinese container vessel suspected of damaging a gas pipeline and several fiber-optic links. The case remains under investigation. Finland has said China is cooperating with Finnish authorities in that probe.

Finnish telecom operator Elisa said on Monday its two undersea telecommunications cables that were damaged in the Dec. 25 incident appeared to have been torn apart by a strong external force, adding that they have now been repaired.

Repairing the Estlink 2 power cable that was broken along with the telecoms cables is expected to take seven months, operators Fingrid of Finland and Elering of Estonia have said.

Austrian far-right Freedom Party leader Herbert Kickl addresses the media in Vienna on Tuesday. LISA LEUTNER/REUTERS

Austrian far right demands conservatives be 'honest'

Francois Murphy
REUTERS

VIENNA – Austrian far-right Freedom Party leader Herbert Kickl called on the conservative People's Party, known as the OVP, to be "honest" in their imminent coalition talks or face the prospect of a snap election, with his support still rising and the OVP's falling.

The euroskeptic, Russia-friendly Freedom Party, known as the FPO, won the last parliamentary election in September with around 29% of the vote but was initially sidelined as centrist parties attempted to form a coalition without it.

Those efforts collapsed over the weekend, prompting President Alexander van der Bellen to task Kickl with forming a government, giving Kickl a chance to become Austria's first FPO chancellor since his party was founded in the 1950s under a leader who had been a senior SS officer and Nazi lawmaker.

"Honest government must be preceded by honest negotiations," Kickl said, adding: "No little games, no tricks, no sabotage."

He also called on new, interim OVP leader Christian Stocker to ensure his party is stable and united, a reference to divisions that appear to have helped collapse the centrist coalition talks.

"If that is not the case, then ... there will be snap election. We are prepared," Kickl said, a clear threat given that opinion polls show FPO support has only risen since September while the OVP's has fallen, with the gap growing to more than 10 percentage points.

Kickl's statement, his first since Van der Bellen announced that he had tasked him with forming a government, was short on policy details.

He said he wanted a "massive political firefighting operation" to bring the Alpine republic's finances under control but did not give specifics.

How to bring the budget deficit back within the European Union's limit of 3% of economic output was the main sticking point in the centrist coalition talks.

It is unclear how the FPO and OVP would achieve that – they both prefer to trim government spending to raising taxes, but are wary of cutting big-ticket items like pensions.

Kickl said he would extend the invitation to talks to the OVP, his only potential coalition partner, after his party's leadership signs off on the move on Tuesday evening, and that once the talks begin they should quickly establish whether a coalition is possible.

FINANCIAL MARKETS

Wall Street ends lower as inflation fears mount

Johann M Cherian, Sukriti Gupta and Carolina Mandl
REUTERS

U.S. stocks tumbled on Tuesday after a batch of upbeat economic data raised concerns that an inflation rebound could slow down the Federal Reserve's pace of monetary policy easing.

Stocks gave up early gains after a Labor Department report showed job openings unexpectedly increased in November, while a separate report said services sector activity accelerated in December with a measure tracking input prices surging to a near two-year high.

"Markets are starting to recognize that they thought we were in the eighth inning of the inflation fight but now it's going to be higher for longer," said Joe Mazzola, head of trading and derivatives strategist at Charles Schwab.

Benchmark 10-year Treasury yields hit 4.699% after the data pointed to a strong economy, the highest since April 26.

"Both of those things potentially have inflationary impacts and, as a result, yields have increased," said Mike Dickson, head of research at Horizon Investments, referring to the economic data. "That's definitely weighing on stocks."

Signs of continued resilience in the economy have pushed back expectations on when the central bank can deliver its first interest rate reduction this year. Traders now see the next cut more likely in June and the Fed staying on hold for the rest of 2025, according to the CME Group's FedWatch tool.

Concerns over the impact of possible tariffs by the incoming Trump administration on consumer prices have also been on investors' minds.

"A mix of solid growth and a new wave of inflationary pressure from tariffs means the Fed will likely switch from cutting interest rates at every decision ... to pausing in between rate cuts in 2025," Bill Adams, chief economist for Comerica Bank, said in a note.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average fell 178.20 points, or 0.42%, to 42,528.36; the S&P 500 lost 66.35 points, or 1.11%, to 5,909.03; and the Nasdaq Composite lost 375.30 points, or 1.89%, to 19,489.68.

Higher yields pushed technology-sector stocks lower by 2.39%. Shares of AI bellwether Nvidia fell 6.22%.

Most of the 11 S&P 500 sectors declined, except for health care and energy stocks.

The main focus of the week is the key non-farm payrolls data, along with minutes from the Fed's December meeting.

In the previous session, the S&P 500 and the Nasdaq closed short of one-week highs on uncertainty after President-elect Donald Trump denied a report that his team was exploring less aggressive tariff policies.

Tesla shares fell 4% after BofA Global Research downgraded the stock to "neutral" from "buy."

Micron Technology rose 2.67% after Nvidia boss Jensen Huang said the chipmaker was providing memory for the AI bellwether's GeForce RTX 50 Blackwell family of gaming chips.

Biden team wraps up expanded clean energy credit guidance

Trump has pledged to gut climate law to cut costs

REUTERS

WASHINGTON – The Biden administration on Tuesday released guidance to help companies secure clean energy tax credits under the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act, finalizing a program to extend subsidies long available for wind and solar to other low-carbon sources.

The move is part of outgoing President Joe Biden's actions meant to shore up his administration's broader efforts to fight climate change. They could prove vulnerable once President-elect Donald Trump takes office later this month on a platform of cutting spending and maximizing fossil fuel output.

Trump has said he will gut the IRA, Biden's signature climate law, to save the U.S. budget hundreds of billions of dollars, though doing so would require support from Congress.

U.S. officials announcing Tuesday's guidance said the IRA's technology-neutral clean energy program offers as much as 30% tax credits for production and investments in climate-friendly power – a perk that has been available to solar and wind projects for years.

The program identifies additional technologies that may be eligible, including marine and hydrokinetic energy, nuclear fission and fusion, hydropower, geothermal and some forms of waste energy recovery.

The administration said the program was crucial to decarbonizing the power sector, the source of around a quarter of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions, and expanding electricity capacity when demand from data centers, industrial users, and electric vehicle owners is surging.

Deputy Treasury Secretary Wally Adeyemo said in a call with reporters that repealing the subsidies could lead to higher power prices for consumers by slowing the pace of new power projects and raising costs for developers.

"Given the increase in demand for electricity throughout this country, and the fact that one of the things that the American people are the most concerned about is increased costs, removing these tax credits would have significant detrimental impact," he said.

The move is part of outgoing President Joe Biden's actions meant to shore up his administration's broader efforts to fight climate change. KEVIN LAMARQUE/REUTERS FILE

The Biden administration has issued other measures in recent days to try to cement its climate agenda. They include banning offshore oil and gas drilling in new areas of the Atlantic, Pacific and elsewhere, and finishing guidance on how companies can secure credits for green hydrogen, produced from renewable energy and needed to decarbonize heavy industry and transport.

Tech group urges US to halt rule that would limit global access to AI chips

Karen Freifeld
REUTERS

A technology industry group on Tuesday urged President Joe Biden's administration to refrain from issuing a last-minute rule that would control global access to AI chips, warning the restrictions would jeopardize U.S. leadership in artificial intelligence.

The Information Technology Industry Council, representing companies like Amazon, Microsoft and Meta, said the rule, which could come out as soon as Friday, would place arbitrary constraints on U.S. companies' ability to sell computing systems overseas and cede the global market to competitors.

Reuters reported exclusive details last month on the Commerce Department's plan for approving global AI chip exports while also preventing bad actors from accessing them. A key aim of the restrictions is to keep AI from supercharging China's military capabilities.

In a letter to U.S. Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo, ITI CEO Jason Oxman criticized the administration's "insistence" on publishing the rule in the final days of Joe Biden's presidency. Donald Trump will be inaugurated Jan. 20.

"Rushing a consequential and complex rule to completion could have significant adverse consequences," Oxman said in the Tuesday letter, a copy of which was obtained by Reuters.

While ITI appreciates the commitment to national security, the letter said, "the potential risks to U.S. global leadership in AI are real and should be taken seriously."

The group asked that any such controls be issued as proposed rulemaking, rather than a rule, given the significant geopolitical and economic implications.

Neither the Commerce Department nor the White House immediately responded to requests for comment.

Industry opposition to the expected rule has become increasingly blunt and public.

The Semiconductor Industry Association issued a statement on Monday night. And on Sunday, Ken Glueck, executive vice president at Oracle, said in a blog post that rather than target activities of concern, the rule "drops the Mother of All Regulations on the commercial cloud industry, regulating... nearly all commercial cloud computing globally for the first time in history."

He said the "Export Control Framework for Artificial Intelligence Diffusion," as the draft rule is titled, "will go down as one of the most destructive to ever hit the U.S. technology industry."

DOJ sues Cushman, other landlords over alleged rental price coordination

Jody Godoy
REUTERS

Cushman & Wakefield was among six large landlords sued by the U.S. Department of Justice over alleged anticompetitive practices in housing rental markets on Tuesday, expanding the DOJ's first case alleging algorithmic collusion.

The DOJ and a coalition of states sued in North Carolina in August, accusing property management software company RealPage of letting landlords collude by sharing their pricing information with the company's software, which then recommends rent prices.

RealPage has denied the allegations, and is seeking to have the lawsuit dismissed.

The amended lawsuit also accuses Cushman, Greystar Real Estate Partners, Blackstone's LivCor, Camden Property Trust, Cushman's Pinnacle Property Management Services and Willow Bridge Property Co. of using RealPage to unlawfully share non-public information about rental pricing.

The landlords also shared pricing strategies with competitors via calls and user groups hosted by RealPage, the DOJ said.

A spokesperson for Cushman said that Pinnacle is solely a property manager and does not own properties or set pricing. Greystar denied engaging in anticompetitive practices and said it would defend against the claims.

Cortland Management has agreed to settle the claims, the DOJ said.

"We believe we were only able to achieve this result because Cortland has invested years and significant internal resources into developing a proprietary revenue management software tool that does not rely on data from external, non-public sources," Cortland said in a statement.

The other companies did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

How Musk's SpaceX looks to gain ground in Italy

REUTERS

MILAN – Billionaire Elon Musk is looking to carve out a role in Italy's telecommunications system by expanding his aerospace business SpaceX and satellite broadband venture Starlink.

Italy is evaluating potential supply accords with Starlink and Musk said on Monday that he was "ready to provide Italy the most secure and advanced connectivity!"

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni has developed a strong relationship with Musk, a close ally of incoming U.S. President Donald Trump.

Starlink, part of SpaceX, has 6,700 active satellites in low-Earth orbit and is a dominant force in the sector, controlling nearly two-thirds of all active satellites.

It provides low-latency broadband to more than 4 million customers across the globe, of whom about 55,000 are in Italy, the eurozone's third-largest economy.

Here are the main projects being discussed:

Secure communications

Italy is evaluating the use of Musk's space-based telecommunications system to provide secure communications between the government, Italian diplomats and defense officials operating in sensitive areas across the Mediterranean.

Reportedly worth $1.6 billion and spread over five years, the project has been under discussion for months. It was made public last October by Italy's Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani.

While confirming talks with SpaceX, Meloni's office on Monday rejected suggestions that was a topic of discussion during the prime minister's surprise visit to meet Trump over the weekend.

Remote and underserved areas

The Italian government is also considering using Starlink's services to boost internet penetration in the most remote areas of the country in response to slow progress by state-backed companies in public-funded fiber roll-out programs

The government is preparing as early as this month to test the space-based service to check whether it is a viable alternative to enhance access to high-speed internet.

Telespazio

Last June, Telespazio, a joint venture between Italian defense and aerospace group Leonardo and French peer Thales, signed a joint venture to commercialize Starlink's services.

Under the deal, Telespazio integrated Starlink into its existing network.

A SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket lifts off from the Cape Canaveral Space Force Station with a payload of Starlink satellites in Cape Canaveral, Fla., on Monday. JOE SKIPPER/REUTERS

UAE in talks on role in post-war Gaza

Temporary governance, peacekeeping discussed

Alexander Cornwell
REUTERS

A Palestinian woman carrying a child walks past the rubble of a house, destroyed in Israeli strikes, in Khan Younis, Gaza Strip, on Tuesday. MOHAMMED SALEM/REUTERS

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates – The United Arab Emirates has discussed with Israel and the United States participating in a provisional administration of post-war Gaza until a reformed Palestinian Authority is able to take charge, according to people familiar with the talks.

The behind-the-scenes discussions, reported by Reuters for the first time, included the possibility of the UAE and the United States, along with other nations, temporarily overseeing the governance, security and reconstruction of Gaza after the Israeli military withdraws and until a Palestinian administration is able to take over, a dozen foreign diplomats and Western officials told Reuters.

The UAE is a close security partner of the U.S. and, unlike most Arab governments, has diplomatic ties with Israel. The diplomats and officials said this provides the Gulf state with some leverage over Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government.

After more than a year of war, Israel remains reluctant to outline its own vision for Gaza and the international community has struggled to formulate a viable plan, said the sources, who asked not to be identified because the conversations were private.

The diplomats and officials stressed the ideas that had emerged from the UAE talks lacked detail and had not been distilled into a formal, written plan nor adopted by any government.

In the behind-the-scenes talks, Abu Dhabi is advocating for a reformed Palestinian Authority to govern Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem under an independent Palestinian state, the sources said – something that Israel has publicly opposed.

"The UAE will not participate in any plan that fails to include significant reform of the Palestinian Authority, its empowerment, and the establishment of a credible roadmap toward a Palestinian state," a UAE official told Reuters, in response to questions about the discussions.

"These elements – which are currently lacking – are essential for the success of any post-Gaza plan."

The PA was established three decades ago under the 1993-1995 Oslo Accords, signed by Israel and Palestinians, and given limited authority over the West Bank and Gaza. It still exercises some governance in the Israeli-occupied West Bank but was run out of Gaza in 2007 by Hamas after a brief civil war.

A U.S. State Department spokesperson told Reuters there had been talks with several partners, including the UAE, on options for governance, security and reconstruction, and that various draft proposals, plans and ideas had been put forward by partners.

"These have been deliberative discussions that continue, as we seek the best way forward," the spokesperson said, declining to comment further on "private diplomatic conversations."

The Israeli prime minister's office declined comment for this story. The Palestinian Authority did not respond to Reuters' questions.

In addition to reforming the PA, four of the diplomats and Western officials said that Emirati officials had suggested the use of private military contractors as part of a post-war peacekeeping force in Gaza. The other sources confirmed they were briefed on what they described as Emirati post-war proposals, which included the possible use of such forces.

The diplomats and Western officials said any deployment of such contractors would spark concerns among Western nations. Private military contractors, hired by the United States and other governments, have faced accusations of torture, human rights abuses, and use of excessive force, among other allegations, including in Iraq and Afghanistan. The UAE official did not respond to questions about the use of military contractors.

Reconstruction will take years

Rebuilding Gaza, including its political institutions, is expected to take years and cost tens of billions of dollars, requiring substantial international support, following 15 months of Israel's devastating military campaign.

While the UAE has criticized the conduct of Israel's military and Netanyahu himself, Israel still wants the oil-rich nation involved in post-war Gaza, according to two former Israeli officials, who declined to be identified.

Like Israel, the Gulf state opposes Hamas, a U.S.-designated terrorist group that led the Oct. 7, 2023, attack on Israel that sparked the war.

Abu Dhabi views Hamas and other Islamist groups as destabilizing forces. UAE officials have also expressed concern publicly over the war's impact on stability in the Middle East and on efforts toward greater regional integration and economic development.

Asked whether Hamas was aware of proposals discussed by the UAE, Basem Naim, one of the organization's senior officials, told Reuters that after the war, Gaza must be "distinctly Palestinian" and without "foreign interventions."

Washington is pushing, alongside mediators Egypt and Qatar, for a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas in Gaza. Israel and Hamas traded blame in late December for delays in reaching a ceasefire – which both sides had said appeared to be close last month. On Monday, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Washington wanted to see a ceasefire deal concluded in the next two weeks.

When asked about the future of Gaza, Brian Hughes, a spokesman for Donald Trump's transition team, said the U.S. president-elect – who is due to take office on Jan. 20 – would work in close coordination with Arab and Israeli partners "to ensure that Gaza can one day prosper."

The UAE has said it would only send troops to a post-war multinational mission at the invitation of the Palestinian Authority and with the involvement of the U.S.

Netanyahu, however, has said he is against the Palestinian Authority in its current form governing Gaza, citing his longstanding grievances over the PA's school syllabus, which he says fuels hatred of Israel, and its policy of giving salaries to families of Palestinians imprisoned in Israel.

The UAE has called for a new prime minister to lead the PA, which Emirati officials frequently criticized as corrupt and inept during the closed-door talks, the diplomats and officials said, without providing specifics.

The apparent escalation in the fighting in Kursk comes at a critical time for Ukraine and its president, Volodymyr Zelenskyy. JOHANNA GERON/REUTERS FILE

Ukraine conducting 'new offensive actions' in Kursk

REUTERS

Ukraine said on Tuesday its forces were "commencing new offensive actions" in Russia's western Kursk region, in its first substantive remarks two days after Russian reports of a renewed Ukrainian thrust in the area.

Ukraine first seized part of the Kursk region in a surprise incursion last August, and it has held territory there for five months despite losing some ground. The Russian defense ministry said on Sunday that Kyiv had launched a new counterattack.

On Tuesday, Ukraine's general staff, which keeps a tight lid on information out of the area for the security of its operation there, said Kyiv's military had hit a Russian command post near the Kursk region's settlement of Belaya.

The strike and other recent operations in the region were coordinated with Ukrainian ground forces who "are currently commencing new offensive operations" against Russian troops, it said.

The military later edited out any mention of a new attack in the Telegram statement, replacing the phrase with the much vaguer "combat operations." It provided no explanation.

Russia's defense ministry, which has characterized the Ukrainian counterattack as bungled over the last two days, said in a statement that its troops had carried out strikes on Ukrainian units in the Kursk region.

It listed six locations where it said its forces had defeated Ukrainian brigades, and seven more – including one on the Ukrainian side of the border – where it said it had carried out strikes on Ukrainian troops and equipment.

Reuters could not independently verify battlefield reports from either side.

The apparent escalation in the fighting in the Kursk region comes at a critical time for Ukraine, whose outnumbered and outgunned troops are struggling to repel Russian advances in the east.

Capturing and retaining a slice of Russian territory in the Kursk region has given Ukraine a bargaining chip in potential peace talks, as both sides fight to improve their battlefield positions before Donald Trump's return to the White House. The U.S. president-elect, who will be sworn in on Jan. 20, has repeatedly said he will end the nearly three-year-old war quickly, but without saying how.

The U.S.-based Institute for the Study of War said geolocated footage from the region published on Sunday and Monday indicated recent Ukrainian advances in three areas northeast of the town of Sudzha.

It said Russian forces were trying to attack elsewhere in the region.

Letter: US shifting some military aid to Lebanon

Patricia Zengerle
REUTERS

The U.S. State Department calls the Lebanese Armed Forces "a key partner" in upholding the Nov. 27, 2024, agreement to cease hostilities. KARAMALLAH DAHER/REUTERS FILE

WASHINGTON – President Joe Biden's administration will divert $95 million in military aid allocated for Egypt to Lebanon, which faces threats from Hezbollah and other non-state actors and is enforcing a ceasefire with Israel, according to a document seen by Reuters on Monday.

The State Department notification to Congress of the planned shift calls the Lebanese Armed Forces "a key partner" in upholding the Nov. 27, 2024, Israel-Lebanon agreement to cease hostilities and to prevent Hezbollah from threatening Israel. The move comes after some of Biden's fellow Democrats in Congress expressed deep concerns about Egypt's human rights record, particularly the arrests of thousands of political prisoners.

In response to questions about the reprogrammed funding, a State Department spokesperson said the department was still moving forward with foreign military financing for Egypt and said the assessment that Cairo had made progress on political prisoners had not changed.

The Egyptian Embassy in Washington did not respond to a request for comment.

In September, State said the Biden administration was overriding human rights conditions on military aid to Egypt, granting Cairo its full allocation of $1.3 billion, including $95 million tied specifically to Egypt's progress on the release of political prisoners.

The notification did not spell out that the $95 million was those funds specifically, but a congressional aide said he did not believe the amount was a coincidence.

Egypt has been a vital partner in the Biden administration's efforts to get more aid into Gaza and has helped mediate the so far unsuccessful efforts to secure a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas. The September decision on the money for Egypt prompted objections from within Congress, including from Democratic Sens. Chris Murphy and Chris Coons, both senior members of the Foreign Relations Committee, who released a joint statement decrying the decision.

Murphy said he welcomed the decision to shift the funding to Lebanon. "Our military aid should advance U.S. values and national security interests in the Middle East – not reflexively reward the Egyptian government, despite its failures to meet human rights conditions set by Congress," he said in a statement.

According to the State Department document, the funds would be made available to professionalize the Lebanese Armed Forces, strengthen border security, combat terrorism and address security requirements affected by the shift in power in Syria.

"The United States remains Lebanon's security partner of choice, and U.S. support to the LAF directly helps secure Lebanon and the wider Levant region," the notification said.

Bolstering Lebanon's army could also help ensure Syria's transition is not disrupted by Iran-backed Shi'ite Islamist group Hezbollah, which previously played a major part in propping up Assad during Syria's civil war.

Under U.S. law, Congress has 15 days to object to a reallocation of military assistance, but a congressional aide familiar with the process commented on Monday that he expected lawmakers would welcome the shift of the funds to Lebanon.

Trump set to reshape government language

David Sherfinski
REUTERS

RICHMOND, Va. – As President-elect Donald Trump prepares to assume the White House on Jan. 20, the federal government is bracing for a massive overhaul in policy – and how it labels issues and individuals.

Potentially limited or wiped from official government websites and documents are references to climate change, "undocumented immigrants" or "non-citizens" in favor of "illegal aliens" and prominent mentions of LGBTQ+ rights, experts say.

Ahead of Trump's first term, researchers expected to see changes that were more subtle – like references to "impacts" versus "effects" of climate change, explained Gretchen Gehrke, Website Monitoring Program Lead at the Environmental Data & Governance Initiative.

"And we did see a fair amount of content changes like that, but what we mostly saw was straight up deletion," she said. "We mostly saw massive access reductions, a lot of information suppression."

This time, Gehrke and other policy advocates are bracing for an even more extreme shift. From references to climate change to diversity, equity and inclusion policies, the likely changes could be more significant than mere semantics.

"It's important how things are presented; it's important to not get rid of actually talking about carbon emissions and actually talking about methane, to just talk about some sort of hand-wavy 'sustainability' without saying what that means," Gehrke said.

"We can't actually address a problem that we can't name."

A spokeswoman for Trump's transition team did not answer directly when asked to what extent references to climate change would be changed or removed but touted his record on energy and the environment in his first term. "In his second term, President Trump will once again deliver clean air and water for American families while Making America Wealthy Again," said Karoline Leavitt.

During Trump's first administration, the U.S. government removed or significantly reduced the prominence of climate change content on government websites and removed information about international obligations on climate change, according to a 2018 report from Gehrke and her colleagues.

Immigration is arguably the most fleshed-out policy priority of the incoming administration. And with it could come a move away from terms like "undocumented immigrants" or "non-citizens" used to describe people who are in the country without valid visas and a return to "illegal alien," an old holdover from immigration law.

The terminology could have implications for refugee and asylum policy if things aren't clearly defined.

New York appeals court denies Trump's bid to halt sentencing

Luc Cohen and Jack Queen
REUTERS

NEW YORK – A New York appellate court on Tuesday denied President-elect Donald Trump's bid to halt sentencing set for Friday for his conviction on criminal charges stemming from hush money paid to an adult film star.

Associate Justice Ellen Gesmer of the Appellate Division, a mid-level state appeals court, made the decision after holding a hearing on Trump's last-ditch effort to block the trial judge's ruling on Monday to proceed with the sentencing, scheduled for 10 days before his inauguration.

In his Monday ruling, Justice Juan Merchan rejected a request from Trump's lawyers to delay the sentencing while they appealed two of the judge's previous rulings upholding the Manhattan jury's May guilty verdict on 34 felony counts of falsifying business records. The judge called Trump's delay request mostly "a repetition of the arguments he has raised numerous times in the past."

In scheduling Trump's sentencing for Friday, Merchan said he was not inclined to send Trump to prison. The judge said a sentence of unconditional discharge, effectively putting a judgment of guilt on his record without a fine or probation, would be the most practical approach given Trump's looming return to the presidency.

In the half-hour hearing over Trump's request for a delay on Tuesday afternoon in Manhattan, Gesmer pressed Trump lawyer Todd Blanche on his argument that a sitting president's immunity from prosecution extends to the transition period between winning the election and inauguration.

"Do you have any support for the notion that presidential immunity extends to a president elect?" Gesmer asked.

Blanche replied: "There has never been a case like this before, so no."

But Blanche raised the prospect of Justice Juan Merchan, the trial judge, imposing a prison sentence that extended past the Jan. 20 inauguration despite the judge's indication that he would not do so.

"I don't find that hypothetical very helpful," Gesmer said, asking Blanche to focus on his arguments related to presidential immunity.

Gesmer asked a lawyer for Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg's office, which brought the case, to address Trump's argument that the sentencing would interfere with the presidential transition.

Steven Wu, the state lawyer, said Merchan had addressed those issues by scheduling sentencing before the inauguration, by allowing Trump to appear virtually and by indicating he would not send Trump to prison.

Wu also noted that the sentencing had initially been scheduled for July had been delayed multiple times at Trump's request, arguing it was "disingenuous" for Trump to now claim the timing of sentencing was impractical. Gesmer appeared to agree.

"If he was concerned about this issue he could've easily had this proceeding go forward in July, in September," Gesmer said.

In a one-line written decision issued about a half-hour after the hearing ended, Gesmer wrote, "After consideration of the papers submitted and the extensive oral argument, (Trump's) application for an interim stay is denied."

In an apparent reference to Merchan, Trump said a "crooked judge" in New York was complicating a smooth transition.

"Remember, this is a man that said he wants the transition to be smooth," Trump told reporters on Tuesday before the hearing began. "Well, you don't do the kind of things. You don't have a judge working real hard to try and embarrass you, because I did nothing wrong."

The case stemmed from a $130,000 payment that Trump's former lawyer Michael Cohen made to adult film actress Stormy Daniels to keep her quiet before the 2016 election about a sexual encounter she said she had a decade earlier with Trump, who denies it. Trump, a Republican, defeated Democrat Hillary Clinton in that election.

Trump has argued that Bragg, a Democrat, brought the case to harm his 2024 election bid. Bragg has said that his office routinely brings felony falsification of business records charges.

The hush money case made Trump the first U.S. president – sitting or former – to be charged with a crime and also the first to be convicted.

Since the verdict, his lawyers have made two unsuccessful attempts to have the case tossed.

Merchan previously rejected their argument that the U.S. Supreme Court's July decision in a separate criminal case against Trump that presidents cannot be prosecuted for official acts meant the hush money case must be dismissed. Merchan ruled that the hush money case concerned Trump's personal conduct.

After Trump won the November election, his lawyers argued that having the case hang over him while serving as president would impede his ability to govern.

Merchan denied that bid, writing that overturning the jury's verdict would be an affront to the rule of law.

Trump sympathizes with Russia's opposition to Ukraine joining NATO

Gram Slattery and Helen Reid
REUTERS

WASHINGTON – President-elect Donald Trump said on Tuesday he sympathized with the Russian position that Ukraine should not be part of NATO, and he lamented that he will not meet Russian President Vladimir Putin before his inauguration.

Speaking at a news conference at his Mar-a-Lago club in Palm Beach, Florida, Trump also blamed outgoing Democratic President Joe Biden for allegedly changing the U.S. position on NATO membership for Ukraine.

"A big part of the problem is, Russia – for many, many years, long before Putin – said, 'You could never have NATO involved with Ukraine.' Now, they've said that. That's been, like, written in stone," Trump said.

"And somewhere along the line Biden said, 'No. They should be able to join NATO.' Well, then Russia has somebody right on their doorstep, and I could understand their feelings about that."

Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization have officially expressed support for Ukraine's eventual membership since the Bucharest Summit of 2008, and the Biden administration continues to support Ukraine's eventual NATO accession, though Ukraine has never been extended an invitation.

Trump's aides and allies generally oppose NATO membership for Ukraine, at least in the foreseeable future, seeing it as an unnecessary provocation toward Moscow. Ukraine's leaders, meanwhile, have aggressively pushed for a NATO invitation, saying it is key to deterring further Russian aggression.

Trump had said on the campaign trail before the Nov. 5 election that he could solve the war in Ukraine before even taking office. While he still says he will quickly solve it, he has largely dropped that line, and he is now due to take office in less than two weeks.

"I hope to have six months. No, I would think, I hope long before six months," Trump said, when asked if he could solve the war within half a year.

"Look, Russia is losing a lot of young people, and so is Ukraine, and it should have never been started."

He also complained that he could not meet with Putin until after he takes office on Jan. 20. He said, without elaborating, that such a meeting would be inappropriate.

"I know that Putin would like to meet," Trump said. "I don't think it's appropriate that I meet until after the 20th which I hate, because, you know, every day people are being – many, many young people are being killed."

Trump

Continued from Page 1NN

we need them for economic security."

Trump criticized American spending on Canadian goods and military support for Canada, saying the U.S. derives no benefits from doing so, and called the border between the two countries an "artificially drawn line."

He suggested he would impose tariffs on Denmark if it resists his offer to purchase Greenland, which he said is vital to U.S. national security. Shortly before Trump's comments, his son Donald Trump Jr. arrived in Greenland for a private visit.

Denmark has said Greenland, a self-governing part of its kingdom, is not for sale.

"I don't think it's a good way forward to fight each other with financial means when we are close allies and partners," Denmark's Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen said late on Tuesday in response to Trump's comments.

Canada's minister of foreign affairs, Melanie Joly, said on X: "President-elect Trump's comments show a complete lack of understanding of what makes Canada a strong country. Our economy is strong. Our people are strong. We will never back down in the face of threats."

Panama's top diplomat also pushed back on the incoming U.S. leader's threat to retake the key global waterway, which the U.S. had built and owned before handing over control to the Central American nation in 1999.

"The only hands that control the canal are Panamanian and that's how it will continue to be," Foreign Minister Javier Martinez-Acha told reporters on Tuesday.

Ambassador Daniel Fried, a retired U.S. diplomat now with the Atlantic Council think tank, said Trump's comments painted a picture of national power as territorial expansion and compared him to a "19th century imperialist."

Seizing Greenland, Fried said, "would destroy NATO, because it would make us no different than Vladimir Putin," Russia's president.

Trump's promise to rename the Gulf of Mexico echoed his previous vow to revert the name of Denali, the highest mountain peak in North America, to Mount McKinley. Former President Barack Obama changed the name of the Alaskan mountain in deference to Native Americans.

Mexican Economy Minister Marcelo Ebrard, who is expected to play a key role in looming U.S.-Mexico trade issues, appeared to dismiss Trump's call to rename the shared body of water later on Tuesday.

"Today I'd tell you if we saw each other in 30 years, the Gulf of Mexico will still be called the Gulf of Mexico," he said, adding that the Mexican government would not get drawn into the debate.

Typically, the U.S. Board of Geographic Names sets geographic names, though presidents have also renamed geographic features via executive action.

NATO spending

Trump said NATO members should spend 5% of their gross domestic product on defense, a significant increase from the current 2% target.

"I think NATO should have 5%," he said. "They can all afford it, but they should be at 5%, not 2%."

Trump has frequently complained that most NATO members are not paying their fair share, and he floated demanding an increase in NATO defense contributions during the campaign.

NATO estimated that 23 of its 32 members would meet its goal of spending 2% of GDP in 2024.

None of the alliance members, including the U.S., currently spends 5% of GDP on defense, according to NATO figures. Poland is the highest spender in GDP terms at 4.12%, followed by Estonia at 3.43% and the United States at 3.38%.

Trump also repeated his threat that "all hell will break out in the Middle East" if Palestinian Hamas militants do not release by the time he takes office hostages it abducted from Israel on Oct. 7, 2023, and still hold in the Gaza Strip.

"It will not be good for Hamas, and it will not be good, frankly, for anyone," he said.

His Middle East envoy, Steve Witkoff, told reporters he hopes to have good things to report on negotiations between Israel and Hamas by the time Trump is sworn into office.

Familiar grievances

The free-wheeling, hourlong news conference, Trump's second since his victory, echoed similar events during his presidential campaign.

He aired a series of familiar grievances about his criminal indictments, including attacking Justice Juan Merchan, the New York judge who is scheduled to sentence Trump on Friday for falsifying business records in connection with hush money payments to an adult film star.

Separately, as Trump was speaking, a U.S. judge temporarily blocked special counsel Jack Smith from releasing a report on his investigations into Trump's alleged mishandling of classified documents and attempts to overturn the 2020 presidential election.

The judge, Aileen Cannon, had previously dismissed the case charging Trump with illegally retaining classified materials after leaving office.

Tuesday's event took place in the ornate living room at Mar-a-Lago, Trump's Palm Beach resort. Several of Trump's senior advisers watched the proceedings.

Oregon's secret recordings ban upheld; Project Veritas appeals

Jonathan Stempel
REUTERS

A federal appeals court on Tuesday upheld an Oregon law banning most secret recordings of oral conversations, rejecting a First Amendment challenge by Project Veritas, a conservative activist group known for using covert recordings against opponents.

In a 9-2 decision, the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Seattle said the so-called conversational privacy law did not violate Project Veritas' free speech rights. It also said the law was narrowly tailored to Oregon's significant governmental interest in ensuring that residents know when they are being recorded.

The decision reversed a July 2023 rejection of the law by a divided three-judge panel of the same court.

Eight judges in Tuesday's majority were appointed to the bench by Democratic presidents, while the dissenting judges and the earlier majority were appointed by Republican presidents.

Benjamin Barr, a lawyer for Project Veritas, said the group will appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court.

He said the decision "leaves undercover journalists with their hands tied in Oregon" by impeding their ability to investigate corruption and work with whistleblowers.

Barr also said the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution should allow secret recordings "just as robustly as it has long shielded traditional practices, like safeguarding the venerable reporter's notepad."

Dan Rayfield, Oregon's new attorney general, said in a statement he was pleased the court recognized the recordings ban as "an important safeguard" for people's right to privacy.

Dating from 1959, Oregon's law contains exceptions that allow recording during a felony that endangers human life, and recording a law enforcement officer performing official duties.

Project Veritas sued in 2020, saying the law made it impossible in Portland, the state's largest city, to record protests about racial injustice following the killing that May of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer.

The group frequently publishes edited recordings that portray liberal organizations and media negatively. Critics have called its tactics deceptive.

During oral arguments last June, Barr told the appeals court that secretly recorded conversations could have a big impact.

He pointed to a 2005 "Access Hollywood" video of President-elect Donald Trump boasting graphically about forcing himself on women, which drew wide attention during the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign.

Oregon countered that the law did not discriminate based on content, and that recording private conversations was not constitutionally protected "expressive conduct."

Writing for Tuesday's majority, Circuit Judge Morgan Christen warned of the risk of secret recordings being shared across the internet, or selectively edited to create audio "deepfakes" where people appear to say things they never said.

Christen, an appointee of former Democratic President Barack Obama, said the law left Project Veritas journalists ample means to go undercover and report what they see and hear, as journalists have done for centuries.

"Powerful exposes authored by people like Nellie Bly, Gloria Steinem, and John Howard Griffin clearly demonstrate what our court has long recognized: 'hidden mechanical contrivances' are not 'indispensable tools' of newsgathering," the judge said.

Man pleads not guilty to NYC subway killing

Jonathan Allen
REUTERS

NEW YORK – The man accused of killing a woman sleeping on a New York City subway car by setting her on fire after what prosecutors say was a night of heavy drinking pleaded not guilty to charges of murder and arson at a court hearing on Tuesday.

A grand jury has indicted Sebastian Zapeta, 33, of one count of first-degree murder, three counts of second-degree murder and one count of first-degree arson in the killing of Debrina Kawam, 57. After his arrest, Zapeta told detectives that he often drinks heavily to the point of blacking out, and that he had done so just before Kawam was killed, according to a court filing by prosecutors on Tuesday.

Crime remains relatively rare on the city's subway, one of the oldest and largest transit systems in the world, but the New York Police Department acknowledged this week that attacks like Kawam's violent killing can terrify New Yorkers. Many were horrified by a brief video of Kawam engulfed in flames near the open doors of a train car, recorded by a bystander on the platform. According to the police account, Zapeta used a lighter to ignite the clothes of Kawam, who appeared to be sleeping on a seat in a stationary F train car at the Coney Island-Stillwell Avenue subway station on the morning of Dec. 22.

He then used a shirt to fan the fire, the police complaint said. Kawam was pronounced dead at the scene after the fire was extinguished. The city's medical examiner said the cause of death was smoke inhalation and thermal injuries. Zapeta is a Guatemalan citizen, federal officials have said, who has been living in a homeless shelter in Brooklyn and working as a roofer in Queens, according to the NYPD.

Carter

Continued from Page 1NN

Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff of Georgia, where Carter served as governor

The carefully choreographed ceremony came at a time of transition in Washington as Republican President-elect Donald Trump prepares to take office from Democratic President Joe Biden on Jan. 20. Security is higher than usual, with fencing surrounding the Capitol.

Carter's flag-draped casket arrived at the Capitol on a horse-drawn caisson after a funeral procession down Pennsylvania Avenue. Family members followed on foot, in a nod to Carter's walk down the boulevard during his 1977 inauguration. Cadets from the U.S. Naval Academy saluted the former Navy submarine officer.

Carter's remains will lie in state in the Rotunda of the Capitol for the next three days for members of Congress and the public to pay their respects. His body will travel by motorcade on Thursday for a funeral service at the Washington National Cathedral.

Carter, who served one White House term from 1977 to 1981, died Dec. 29 at the age of 100.

The former Georgia peanut farmer struggled with a bad economy and the Iran hostage crisis while in office and was handily defeated for re-election by Republican Ronald Reagan.

In the decades after, he earned a reputation as a committed humanitarian and was widely seen as a better former president than he was a president.

He won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002.

Carter lived longer than any other U.S. president and had been in hospice care for nearly two years before his death. His last public appearance was at wife Rosalynn's funeral in November 2023, where he used a wheelchair and appeared frail.

In August, his grandson Jason Carter said Carter was looking forward to casting a ballot for Harris in the Nov. 5 election, which she lost to Trump.

Biden has ordered flags at government buildings to be flown at half-staff for 30 days as a sign of mourning. That has irked Trump, who has said they should not be lowered during his inauguration.

At a news conference, Trump reiterated his desire to take back control of the Panama Canal, which Carter signed over to Panama during his presidency.

Members of the public will be able to view the casket from 6:00 p.m. until midnight local time.

On Wednesday, public viewing hours will resume at 7 a.m. local time, and Carter will lie in state in the Rotunda with a military guard of honor for 24 hours.

Both Biden and Trump were expected to attend Carter's funeral service at 10 a.m. local time on Thursday.

Biden was expected to deliver the eulogy. After the funeral, Carter's remains will be flown back home to Georgia. His body will be interred later that day in his hometown of Plains.

Hostages

Continued from Page 1NN

the war until Hamas is dismantled and all hostages are free.

"Hamas is the only obstacle to the release of the hostages," the director general of Israel's foreign ministry, Eden Bar Tal, told a briefing with reporters, saying Israel was fully committed to reaching a deal.

Hamas official Osama Hamdan, who held a news conference in Algiers, said Israel was to blame for undermining all efforts to reach a deal.

While he said he would not give details about the latest round of negotiations, he reiterated the Hamas conditions of "a complete end to the aggression and a full withdrawal from lands the occupation invaded."

Commenting on Trump's threat that there would be "hell to pay" unless all hostages were freed before the inauguration, Hamdan said: "I think the U.S. president must make more disciplined and diplomatic statements."

Israel has sent a team of mid-ranking officials to Qatar for talks brokered by Qatari and Egyptian mediators. Some Arabic media reports said David Barnea, the head of Mossad, who has been leading negotiations, was expected to join them. The Israeli prime minister's office did not comment.

In one notable step towards a deal, a Hamas official told Reuters on Sunday the group had cleared a list submitted by Israel of 34 hostages who could be freed in the initial phase of a truce, alongside Palestinian prisoners held by Israel.

The list included female Israeli soldiers, plus elderly, female and minor-aged civilians. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said Israel had so far received no confirmation about whether those on its list were still alive.

Nearly 46,000 Palestinians have been killed in Israel's assault on Gaza, according to health officials in the enclave.

The assault was launched after Hamas fighters stormed Israeli territory in October 2023, killing 1,200 people and capturing more than 250 hostages, according to Israeli tallies.

Israeli military strikes killed at least 24 Palestinians across the Gaza Strip on Tuesday, medics said, as the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory urged international donors to immediately provide fuel to run generators and maintain medical services.

One of those strikes killed four people in a house in Gaza City and six were killed in separate strikes across the enclave, medics said.

Later on Tuesday, an Israeli strike on a tent in Khan Younis in the southern Gaza Strip killed four children and eight Palestinians were killed in an Israeli airstrike on a house in Jabalia in the north, medics said.

Additionally, an Israeli strike on a car in Khan Younis killed two people, medics and civil emergency service officials said.

The Israeli military did not immediately respond to a request for comment on those strikes.

It said 240 Palestinians its forces had detained in a raid on Kamal Adwan Hospital in northern Gaza last month had provided "substantial intelligence".

The military released footage of the interrogation of a purported Hamas militant who detailed how militants "operated from the hospital area" and transferred weapons to and from it.

Hamas and the Gaza health ministry deny any armed presence at the hospital.

IN BRIEF

Confirmation hearings for top Trump diplomatic pick on Jan. 15

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee will hold its confirmation hearing for President-elect Donald Trump's nominee to be Secretary of State next week, a committee spokesperson said on Tuesday.

The hearing for Republican U.S. Senator Marco Rubio, a senior member of the foreign relations panel, to be secretary of State, will take place on Jan. 15.

He is expected to be confirmed in the Republican-majority Senate.

The spokesperson said the hearing date for Republican U.S. Representative Elisa Stefanik to be the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations had not yet been set.

Harris to travel to Singapore, Bahrain and Germany

WASHINGTON – U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris will travel to Europe, the Middle East and Asia from Jan. 13 through Jan. 17, the White House said on Tuesday.

The trip, which will likely be Harris' last as vice president before leaving office on Jan. 20, will have stops in Singapore, Bahrain, and Germany, according to the White House. She will be accompanied by her husband, Doug Emhoff.

The White House said Harris will meet with leaders and visit Changi Naval Base while in Singapore on Jan. 15.

The following day, she will meet with leaders in Manama, Bahrain, and visit Naval Support Activity-Bahrain, the headquarters of U.S. Naval Forces Central Command and the U.S. 5th Fleet, it added.

On Jan. 16, Harris will be in Spangdahlem, Germany, to visit the U.S. Air Force 52nd Fighter Wing at Spangdahlem Air Base, according to the White House.

"Throughout her trip, the vice president will discuss the accomplishments of the Biden-Harris Administration over the past four years in each region, the U.S. partnership with the respective nations, the contributions of U.S. military forces to regional and global security, and the enduring national security interests of the United States," the White House said.

Trudeau rejects idea of forcing Canada to become US state

OTTAWA – Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on Tuesday dismissed a suggestion by U.S. President-elect Donald Trump that he might use "economic force" to make Canada the 51st U.S. state.

"There isn't a snowball's chance in hell that Canada would become part of the United States," he said in a post on X. "Workers and communities in both our countries benefit from being each other's biggest trading and security partner."

Trump, speaking in Mar-a-Lago, was asked if he was considering using military force to acquire Canada.

"No, economic force," he responded. "Because Canada and the United States, that would really be something."

Trump, who has long complained about Canada's trade surplus with the U.S., had earlier told reporters the border was an "artificially drawn line."

Trump has threatened to impose a 25% tariff on imports from Canada, which sends 75% of all goods and services exports south of the border.

Earlier on Tuesday, Canadian Foreign Minister Melanie Joly said Trump's comments "show a complete lack of understanding of what makes Canada a strong country ... We will never back down in the face of threats."

Disney names new president of Europe, Middle East and Africa

Walt Disney has named Tony Chambers president of Disney in Europe, Middle East and Africa, as part of a restructuring of its entertainment businesses in the region, the company said Tuesday.

Chambers, former head of theatrical distribution, will assume the new role in February, overseeing Disney's streaming, ad sales, studio marketing, theatrical distribution and sports in the region. He will report to Disney Entertainment co-chairmen Alan Bergman and Dana Walden and ESPN Chairman Jimmy Pitaro.

"Tony Chambers is a seasoned senior executive who has a highly collaborative style and stellar reputation in EMEA and across the company, and he brings a wealth of experience to this important new role," Bergman, Walden and Pitaro said in a joint statement.

REUTERS

SPORTS EXTRA

Lions running back Jahmyr Gibbs carries for a touchdown against the Minnesota Vikings on Sunday in Detroit. LON HORWEDEL/IMAGN IMAGES

NFL WEEK 18 WINNERS AND LOSERS

Lions roar with their 1st No. 1 seed in NFC

Lorenzo Reyes
USA TODAY

Once again, it's that time of the year.

The NFL regular season concluded Sunday, ushering in the start of the playoffs with the wild-card round this coming weekend.

And no team gained more than the Detroit Lions, who earned the NFC's No. 1 seed after taking down the division-rival Minnesota Vikings, who tumbled to the conference's fifth seed after their loss in the regular-season finale. That means Detroit will join the Kansas City Chiefs, who already claimed the AFC's top seed, as the two teams with first-round byes and home-field advantage throughout the postseason.

Elsewhere, the Tampa Bay Buccaneers (narrowly) took care of business, while the Denver Broncos left no doubt.

Here are the winners and losers from the final NFL Sunday of the 2024 regular season.

Winners

Lions make (more) history: After a close first half, Detroit (15-2) throttled the Vikings (14-3) in the second half to earn its first ever No. 1 seed in the NFC in team history. The victory also extended the team record for most wins in franchise history. It was a typical Lions masterclass: The offense – which took some time to get going – launched explosive plays that built and then extended a lead.

More impressive, however, was the defensive game plan coordinator Aaron Glenn deployed, unleashing relentless

See NFL, Page 2NS

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Ohio State entering semifinals as favorite

Blake Toppmeyer
College football columnist
USA TODAY NETWORK

The front-runner, the colossus, the team no opponent should want to face in this College Football Playoff, hid in plain sight.

If we ever didn't see it, then we let ourselves look past the 300-pound gorilla. We either allowed an unsightly loss to a bitter rival cloud our judgment, or we ignored college football's history that tells us the most talented teams enjoy the best shot at national titles.

Coaches can make college football sound pretty complex, but when you boil it down, the coiner of the phrase "Jimmys and Joes beat X's and O's" was one smart cookie.

Ohio State, its first two playoff games, combined an unmatchable amount of "Jimmy and Joe" talent with shrewd X's and O's.

The result: Back-to-back blowout wins against teams that had combined for a 23-2 record. That included its 41-21 Rose Bowl rout of No. 1 Oregon.

No more hiding in plain view, Ohio State. No more playing opossum against Michigan and getting to spend a few weeks as a doubted squad.

We see you clearly now, Buckeyes. You're the monster. You sit in the catbird seat. You're the team that, on your

See TOPPMEYER, Page 3NS

Ohio State running back TreVeyon Henderson scores a touchdown against Oregon during the Rose Bowl on Jan. 1. KIRBY LEE/IMAGN IMAGES

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Florida guard Alijah Martin dunks the ball against Tennessee during the second half of Tuesday's game in Gainesville, Fla. The Gators defeated the top-ranked Volunteers 73-43. MATT PENDLETON/IMAGN IMAGES

GATORS HAND VOLS 1ST LOSS OF SEASON

Alijah Martin scored 18 points, Denzel Aberdeen added 16 and No. 8 Florida controlled the game from the outset while steamrolling top-ranked Tennessee 73-43 on Tuesday night in Southeastern Conference play in Gainesville, Fla. The Volunteers (14-1, 1-1) are the last team in the nation to lose a game this season. They were vying for the first 15-0 start to a season in program history. **ROUNDUP, 4NS**

NFL

NOTEBOOK

Raiders fire coach Pierce after 1st full season

FIELD LEVEL MEDIA

The Las Vegas Raiders fired head coach Antonio Pierce on Tuesday, two days after concluding a 4-13 season.

Pierce, 46, went 9-17 over 1½ seasons as coach. He first became coach on an interim basis after the midseason firing of Josh McDaniels in 2023.

"The Las Vegas Raiders have relieved Antonio Pierce of his duties as head coach," the team said in its announcement. "We appreciate Antonio's leadership, first as an interim head coach and this past season as the head coach.

"Antonio grew up a Raiders fan and his Silver and Black roots run deep. We are grateful for his ability to reignite what it means to be a Raider throughout the entire organization. We wish nothing but the best for Antonio and his family in the future."

The Las Vegas Raiders fired Antonio Pierce, shown during Sunday's game, on Tuesday after 1 ½ seasons as head coach. KIRBY LEE/IMAGN IMAGES

Dolphins general manager says WR Hill did not request trade

Miami Dolphins general manager Chris Grier said star wide receiver Tyreek Hill has not directly requested a trade.

Both Grier and head coach Mike McDaniel met with Hill on Monday, one day after the wideout hinted that he was ready to leave Miami.

"There's a lot of things that I need to reassess about my career," Hill told reporters Sunday. "I just gotta do what's best for me and my family, whether that's here or wherever the case may be.

"... I'm out, bro. It was great playing here, but at the end of the day, I gotta do what's best for my career. I'm too much of a competitor to be just out there."

Grier said Hill did not retract those comments. "But he never asked for a trade with me," Grier told reporters at Tuesday's end-of-season news conference.

"They were (productive) conversations," Grier said. "I will keep those between us. The one thing I would say is, in a frustrating season, he was very emotional in a game where we had a chance, coming back from 2-6. All of that with him playing through his (wrist) injury just kind of bubbled to a point."

Report: Bears to interview Carroll; McCarthy request denied

The Chicago Bears were denied an interview with Dallas Cowboys coach Mike McCarthy for their head coaching vacancy but will sit down with longtime NFL coach Pete Carroll on Thursday, according to pair of ESPN reports on Tuesday.

Carroll, 73, won a Super Bowl during his 14-year tenure with Seattle and has the most wins of any Seahawks coach (137). He also set the record for most playoff appearances (10) and wins (10) in franchise history. Carroll served as an adviser this season after stepping down following the 2023 campaign.

Carroll also guided the New York Jets (1994) and New England Patriots (1997-99) and has a 170-120-1 record as an NFL head coach.

He excelled in the college ranks, winning two national championships at Southern California during his nine-year tenure and finishing with a 97-19 record. Carroll is one of only three coaches to win both a Super Bowl and a college national championship.

As for McCarthy, his deal expires Wednesday with the Cowboys having exclusive negotiating rights through Jan. 14.

McCarthy, 61, completed his fifth season at the helm with Dallas missing the playoffs at 7-10.

Report: Patriots interviewing former QB Leftwich for coach

The New England Patriots are interviewing Byron Leftwich for their head coaching vacancy on Tuesday, The Athletic reported.

The Patriots fired Jerod Mayo on Sunday after compiling a 4-13 record in his first season in Foxborough.

Leftwich, 44, most recently worked as the offensive coordinator for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers from 2019-22, a stint that included a Super Bowl win in the 2020 season.

Leftwich was fired by Bucs head coach Todd Bowles after the 2022 season, which saw Tampa Bay slip from the top 3 in scoring the previous three seasons to No. 15 in yards and No. 25 in points in 2022.

Lions expect RB Montgomery back for playoff run after bye

The Detroit Lions plan for running back David Montgomery to be back for their first playoff game in the NFC divisional round.

Asked Tuesday whether he expected Montgomery (knee) to be ready to play next week, normally fiery head coach Dan Campbell kept it short and said, "I do."

Montgomery injured the MCL in his left knee in Week 15 during the Lions' 48-42 loss to the Buffalo Bills. Originally thought to be a season-ending injury, Montgomery received other medical opinions and instead rehabbed his knee with an eye on a postseason return.

Chargers sign RB Elliott to practice squad for playoff depth

Running back Ezekiel Elliott joined the practice squad of the Los Angeles Chargers after wide receiver Laviska Shenault was released.

Elliott, 29, was released by the Dallas Cowboys on New Year's Eve, ending his second stint with the team. The Chargers are headed to the postseason, starting with a visit to Houston in the wild-card round on Saturday.

"Competitors welcome at the Los Angeles Chargers," coach Jim Harbaugh said Tuesday. "Great to see him. He's here and he'll start having at it."

Elliott and Chargers pass rusher Joey Bosa were teammates at Ohio State before they entered the NFL on back-to-back selections in the top five of the 2016 draft. Bosa went No. 3 before the Cowboys took Elliott fourth.

Jaguars request interviews with eight head-coaching candidates

Jacksonville Jaguars general manager Trent Baalke requested interviews with eight candidates to replace Doug Pederson as head coach.

The team released the names of the coaches on Tuesday, including former New York Jets head coach Robert Saleh, Detroit Lions coordinators Ben Johnson and Aaron Glenn, Las Vegas Raiders defensive coordinator Patrick Graham and a handful of offensive coordinators: Kellen Moore (Philadelphia Eagles), Todd Monken (Baltimore Ravens), Joe Brady (Buffalo Bills), Liam Coen (Tampa Bay Buccaneers).

No. 1 pick secured, Titans fire general manager Ran Carthon

The Tennessee Titans fired general manager Ran Carthon on Tuesday after two seasons with the organization.

Two days after the Titans concluded a 3-14 season and gained ownership of the top overall pick of the 2025 NFL Draft, there is another layer of mystery around the organization. Tennessee went 9-25 in two seasons under Carthon's watch.

President of football operations Chad Brinker will lead the search for a new general manager, while Brian Callahan will return for a second season as the head coach, the organization confirmed.

NFL

Continued from Page 1

pressure to unsettle Vikings quarterback Sam Darnold, who posted a season-low completion percentage (43.9%). What's even more impressive is that the Lions so thoroughly dismantled Minnesota despite losing the turnover battle 2-0.

One reason why the bye is essential: Detroit is among the most banged-up teams, particularly on defense, and the extra time off should help them heal up a bit more.

Broncos prove they're no fluke: One season ago, before Sean Payton ever coached a game with the Broncos, he roasted the job his predecessor Nathaniel Hackett did in an interview with USA TODAY Sports' Jarrett Bell. Payton drew widespread criticism. Now, a year-and-a-half later, although the delivery was perhaps overtly blunt and better left withheld from public consumption, Payton was proven right.

The Broncos (10-7) have snapped an eight-season playoff drought, and Payton's tutelage of rookie quarterback Bo Nix is a big reason why. While the Chiefs rested their starters, the Broncos absolutely took care of business in a 38-point shutout. Nix had three incompletions and four passing touchdowns, going 26-of-29 for 321 yards.

Buccaneers squeak in: Tampa Bay, for the fourth consecutive season, has won the NFC South. It didn't come without drama, as the Saints led by 10 at the half and by six at the start of the fourth, but the Buccaneers (10-7), as they have for most of the season, relied on grit, competitiveness, well-timed playmaking in the clutch and resilience.

And no player has embodied the Buccaneers resilience more than quarterback Baker Mayfield, who finished the regular season ranked third in passing yards (4,500), tied for second in passing touchdowns (41) and fourth in QB rating (106.8).

Broncos quarterback Bo Nix looks to pass in the third quarter of Sunday's game against the Kansas City Chiefs in Denver. ISAIAH J. DOWNING/IMAGN IMAGES

Commanders stay in 6-seed: Commanders coach Dan Quinn said Washington (12-5) would "fight like hell" to take the No. 6 seed. He removed quarterback Jayden Daniels from the game, so perhaps that was slightly disingenuous, but a game-winning touchdown pass to Terry McLaurin with three seconds left kept the Commanders from having to face the Eagles (14-3) in the wild-card round.

Instead, Washington will face the Buccaneers, a team whose defense the Commanders can exploit. Tampa Bay installs bodies in the box to stop the run and does that well. But the Buccaneers are a bit banged up in the secondary and struggle to stop the pass.

Bryce Young: When he was benched after Week 2, it looked like Bryce Young's future with the Panthers – despite his being selected No. 1 overall in the 2023 draft – was in doubt. Yet Carolina (5-12) was forced to turn back to Young, and he has rewarded the Panthers with the best play of his career.

Over the last eight games of the season, Young has completed 62.1% of his throws for 1,709 yards and has scored 17 total touchdowns against three interceptions. The offensive line is still an issue, but Young has developed more confidence and is processing quicker.

Losers

Vikings tumble to 5-seed: Minnesota (14-3) certainly lost more than any playoff team, missing out on the potential top seed in the NFC and instead settling in at No. 5. The concern for the Vikings is whether Detroit's constant barrage of pressure provides something of a blueprint for other teams to replicate. That said, not many teams have the athleticism and discipline that the Lions do.

Detroit held the Vikings without a single conversion in three fourth-down tries, four red-zone attempts and three goal-to-goal scenarios. But there's still a chance for the Vikings to earn the ultimate bragging right; if they beat the Rams in the wild-card round, they will get a rematch against the Lions in two weeks in the divisional round.

Defense lets Falcons down, again: Given the optimism with which the Falcons (8-9) entered this season, with the signing of Kirk Cousins and a reworked coaching staff, this year can be considered nothing but a failure. For Atlanta to make it into the postseason, it needed to beat the Panthers and rely on the Saints beating the Buccaneers. Neither happened.

Patriots opt for chaos: Perhaps they became so spoiled by the constant continuity of the 24 seasons of the Bill Belichick era, perhaps they impractically thought the first year of a rebuild would be better than this, but the Patriots (4-13) opted for instability by making Jerod Mayo, who had been appointed as Belichick's successor, a one-and-done.

More may emerge in the coming days about internal friction, and Mayo's operation was far from perfect, but New England should know better than most teams that coaching instability is the quickest path toward poor performance and irrelevance. The roster has massive holes and the offense lacks elite playmaking ability, particularly at receiver. Rookie quarterback Drake Maye will now almost certainly have three different offensive coordinators in as many seasons, going back to his final season with the Tar Heels.

Dolphins, Bengals discover pitfalls: Both these squads needed help and both missed out on the playoffs. Cincy (9-8) started miserably slowly, beginning 1-4, including a season-opening loss to the rebuilding Patriots, a team that finished with four wins.

Miami couldn't weather early-season struggles, and its plan at backup quarterback doomed its prospects. The Dolphins couldn't even top the struggling Jets on Sunday, allowing Aaron Rodgers to throw four touchdowns, the first time he has done so since Week 13 ... of 2021.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF

ORANGE BOWL NOTEBOOK

Notre Dame DC Golden set to face alma mater

FIELD LEVEL MEDIA

This week's trip to South Florida isn't the first homecoming for Notre Dame defensive coordinator Al Golden. He's come back in the years since the end of his tenure as head coach at the University of Miami.

Golden

But facing his alma mater, Penn State, in the Capital One Orange Bowl this Thursday night with a chance to advance to the College Football Playoff national championship game is sparking a different set of emotions.

Golden, 55, was a tight end at Penn State from 1988-1991 before a brief NFL stint with the New England Patriots.

"I'm excited that Penn State is doing well and happy for the program, but more importantly it's been a great journey for us," Golden said on Tuesday afternoon after the Fighting Irish arrived at the team's hotel in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. "This is my third year at Notre Dame and I had an opportunity to build it with Coach (Marcus) Freeman and get to this point. It's been a long time and we're on the brink of being where we want to be when we had our first conversations."

Golden, who coached Miami from 2011-2015, has been back to coach in South Florida on two prior occasions when he was an assistant coach for the Detroit Lions and Cincinnati Bengals.

But Thursday's game will be the first time he'll be on the sideline at Hard Rock Stadium for a collegiate game since he was fired in Week 8 of the 2015 season following a humbling 58-0 loss to Clemson.

At Notre Dame, Golden has helped build one of the top defenses in college football. The Irish rank second in the nation in scoring defense (13.6 points allowed per game) and fifth in passing yards allowed (167.4 per game). Golden has been rumored of late as a possible candidate to return to the NFL next season.

"For me, I've loved the people I had the opportunity to form relationships with when I was here and the student-athletes I had the chance to work with," Golden said. "I've reconciled that stage and had great moments since."

Notes

- Penn State continues to be aggressive and successful on fourth downs this season, which was a byproduct of having the depth it lacked in recent years, according to coach James Franklin.

The Nittany Lions have converted 16 of 23 such attempts this season, which puts them in a tie for 13th nationally in fourth down conversion percentage. Penn State ranked 88th in that category in 2021 before ranking in the top eight each of the past two seasons.

"You've got to play to your strengths, and sometimes your strength is to punt and play good defense and early on, that was our strength when we got here," Franklin said. "We had a little bit more depth and talent on that side of the ball."

- It's unclear whether Notre Dame will have two of its top players available for Thursday's game.

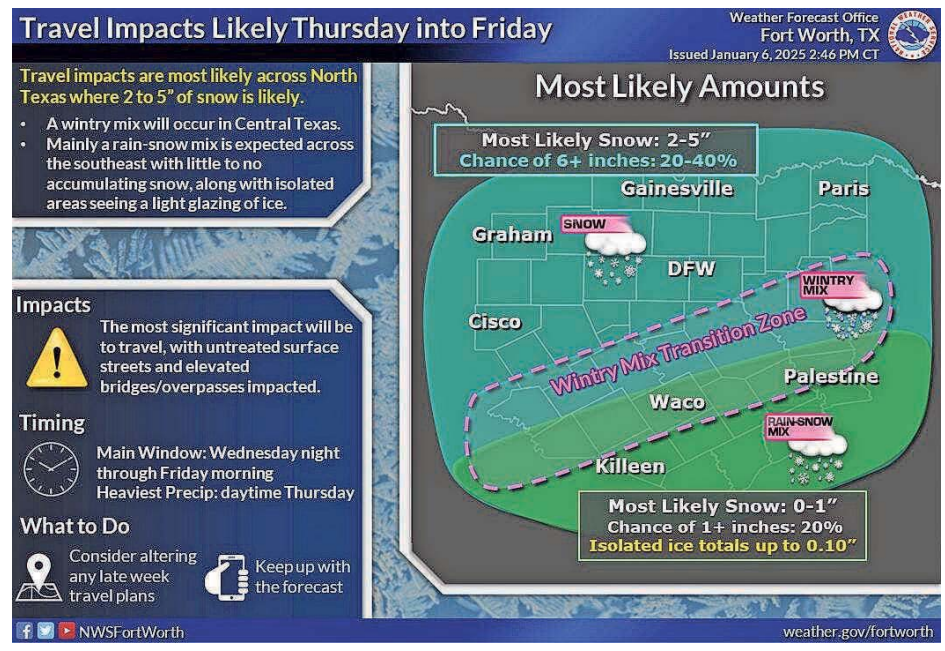
Linebacker Kyngstonn Viliamu-Asa, who played 13 snaps against Georgia in the quarterfinals, continued to practice this week although albeit with a brace on his right knee.

Jeremiyah Love is also working his way back from a knee injury, but it's unclear how close he is to returning to action.

- The Orange Bowl brought back memories for Penn State wide receiver Liam Clifford, who was once recruited by Notre Dame out of St. Xavier High School in Cincinnati. Clifford has caught 18 passes for 286 yards and a touchdown this season.

"I grew up a Notre Dame fan and the games I went to as a kid were always Notre Dame games, and my cousin was going there at the time," Clifford said on Tuesday during the team's media conference in Fort Lauderdale. "This is a cool full-circle moment for me. They have a ton of tradition, which makes this game awesome."

COTTON BOWL



The National Weather Service in Dallas/Ft. Worth is predicting 4 to 6 inches of snow the same week as the Cotton Bowl. NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE

Officials on alert as winter storm targets North Texas

FIELD LEVEL MEDIA

A winter storm barreling down on North Texas could cause havoc days before the Cotton Bowl on Friday.

The College Football Playoff semifinal game between Texas and Ohio State has officials in Arlington, Texas, concerned about traffic and safety because of the amount of snowfall – between 4 and 6 inches – projected to land in the area. Weather Channel said the annual average snowfall for Arlington, Texas, is just over 1.5 inches meaning about four times the annual amount could be on the ground to potentially clog roadways and challenge the energy grid.

A similar timeline played out in 2011 when the Super Bowl was held at AT&T Stadium.

This week, meteorologists are calling for up to six inches of total accumulation beginning Wednesday night in Dallas-Fort Worth and a winter storm watch has been issued starting Thursday at midnight Central through 6 p.m. Friday. The Cotton Bowl is scheduled for a 6:30 p.m. kickoff local time.

"We are routinely monitoring weather reports and we are in close contact with AT&T Stadium and local officials," a Cotton Bowl official said in a statement. "We always have plans for inclement weather. Should conditions warrant it, we will communicate to everyone attending and connected with this year's Goodyear Cotton Bowl Classic."

Areas from Little Rock, Ark., to Memphis, Tenn., and further south of Arlington all are on high alert with the impact of the storm shifting from possible freezing rain to snow.

Once fans reach the stadium, the environment in the indoor venue offers temperature-controlled comfort for the playoff game.

Friday's forecast calls for highs near 34 degrees near the stadium.

Kevin Oden, the director of emergency management and crisis response in Dallas, said the "priority is ensuring safe travel for the teams and their fans visiting Dallas in the Metroplex."

Parts of North Texas measured four inches of snowfall on game week during the Super Bowl in 2011.

Toppmeyer

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best day, performs as well as 2019 LSU or 2020 Alabama or 2022 Georgia. You're the front-runner, not only against Texas in the Cotton Bowl, but against whomever comes next.

Investment in CFP pays off

Ohio State spent a reported $20 million in NIL investment to assemble this team, and you don't need to be an NFL scout to spot the Buckeyes' obvious advantages.

"You guys keep talking about a $20 million roster," former Alabama coach Nick Saban said on "College GameDay" before the Buckeyes' season opener. "If you don't pay the right guys, you'll be (crap) out of luck."

Well, Nick, they paid the right guys, and that's what made the Michigan loss so inexplicable, because the Buckeyes are loaded.

The College Football Playoff semifinals feature four premier defenses, but Ohio State's ranks as the best, a unit that's not surrendered more than 17 points to any opponent other than Oregon.

More, the Buckeyes built the most complete team, featuring the nation's most elite receivers, a backfield tandem as good as any, an improving offensive line and a quarterback who only muddled through one truly bad game.

Will Howard's lone stumble just so happened to occur when the most eyes were upon him, while Ohio State continued its cursed streak against Michigan.

Saban could tell us all about the value of talent acquisition. College football's existence before NIL collectives and transfer free agency was one of a few teams, headlined by Saban's Alabama, stockpiling the deepest wealth of talent, emerging as juggernauts and ruling with a strong grip.

Saban did a lot well at Alabama, but his persistent ability to magnetize, unify and develop the most talented players ranked as his super skill, unlocking his six national titles in Tuscaloosa.

Ohio State quarterback Will Howard (18) motions during the second half of the College Football Playoff quarterfinal against the Oregon at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, Calif., on Jan. 1. ADAM CAIRNS/COLUMBUS DISPATCH - USA TODAY NETWORK

The playing field leveled somewhat these past few years when donors from coast to coast started buying players with deals doled out through organized collectives rather than an under-the-table bagman.

Although NIL spending is not open record, nobody would deny Ohio State paced the spending war for this season. Money talks. Talent followed. Ohio State coach Ryan Day put together the best roster, Buckeyes fans knew it, and they fumed after Day lost twice during the regular season, including to the dreaded rival up north.

And because of that loss to Michigan, the CFP selection committee got heavy-handed with the Buckeyes' seeding. The committee placed a No. 8 next to their name, after they'd built a resume worthy of the No. 5 seed, awarded to the top at-large team.

Carrying front-runner mantle

That seed and the accompanying bracket placement dealt the Buckeyes the toughest path to the national championship game among teams seeded within the top eight.

No matter. Talent prevailed.

Asked to explain the 187-yard receiving day from Jeremiah Smith, Ohio State's freshman wide receiver, in the Rose Bowl, Oregon coach Dan Lanning said: "The guy is NFL-ready."

So are many of Smith's teammates. Lanning's Ducks trailed Ohio State by 34 points long before the sun began to sink beyond the San Gabriel Mountains.

The NFL must wait on Smith – he's a 19-year-old performing like a multi-time All-Pro – but plenty of Buckeyes will hear their names called by Roger Goodell three months from now.

The easy narrative became that losing to Michigan motivated the Buckeyes or refocused them or forced the coaching staff to remove guardrails from the game plan. A serving of truth probably could be found in each idea, but the other reality is, Ohio State spent much of the season performing like a top-tier squad, wilted on one November day against a rival, then resurrected as the behemoth it is.

By smashing Tennessee and splintering Oregon, Ohio State showed its cards, and there's no hiding it now. The Buckeyes wrested away favorite status. Are they strong enough to carry that mantle?

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COLLEGE BASKETBALL

MEN'S TOP 25 ROUNDUP

No. 8 Florida dominates No. 1 Tennessee

FIELD LEVEL MEDIA

Alijah Martin scored 18 points, Denzel Aberdeen added 16 and No. 8 Florida controlled the game from the outset while steamrolling top-ranked Tennessee 73-43 on Tuesday night in Southeastern Conference play at Gainesville, Fla.

Alex Condon had 12 points and 12 rebounds and Rueben Chinyelu collected a career-high 15 rebounds as the Gators (14-1, 1-1 SEC) delivered full-scale domination of the Volunteers. Florida never trailed and led by as many as 36 points.

Tennessee (14-1, 1-1) is the last team in the nation to lose a game this season. It was vying for the first 15-0 start to a season in program history. The Volunteers will go into the record books tied with the 1922-23 squad for the best start.

Tennessee shot a porous 21.4 percent from the field (12 of 56) and 13.8 percent from 3-point range (4 of 29) as part of a dismal showing. Chaz Lanier had 10 points and seven rebounds but made just 3 of 16 shots from the field while Zakai Zeigler also had 10 points for the Volunteers.

Florida shot 39.7 percent from the field and went 6-for-20 from behind the arc.

Iowa State guard Curtis Jones (5) shoots the ball around Utah forward Zach Keller during Tuesday's game in Ames, Iowa. NIRMALENDU MAJUMDAR/AMES TRIBUNE

No. 2 Auburn 87, Texas 82

Johni Broome racked up 20 points and 12 rebounds as Auburn (14-1, 2-0 SEC) held on for a win over Texas (11-4, 0-2) in Austin, Texas.

The win was the 214th for Tigers coach Bruce Pearl, propelling him to No. 1 in all-time coaching wins at the school. He had been tied with Joel Eaves (1949-63).

Broome's double-double was the 70th of his career – and his 10th this season. Miles Kelly added 18 points, Chad Baker-Mazara had 16 and Denver Jones and Tahaad Pettiford tallied 10 each for Auburn, which won its seventh straight game and first true road contest this season.

Arthur Kaluma scored a career-high 34 points for the Longhorns, who have dropped two straight games. Jordan Pope added 19 and Tre Johnson scored 11.

The Tigers broke open a tight game with a 12-2 run early in the first half on the way to 12-point lead at halftime. Auburn pushed the margin to 21 points seven minutes into the second half, but the Longhorns began chipping away at the deficit, pulling to within 83-80 on two free throws by Pope with 33 seconds remaining.

No. 3 Iowa State 82, Utah 59

Reserve Curtis Jones scored 23 points and Iowa State (13-1, 3-0 Big 12) pulled away for a win over Utah (8-6, 0-3) in Ames, Iowa.

Tamin Lipsey added 20 points for Iowa State, which won its 10th in a row. Joshua Jefferson scored 17 and Keshon Gilbert finished with 15. Lipsey and Jefferson each grabbed a game-high seven rebounds.

Gabe Madsen scored 20 points to lead Utah. Miro Little finished with 13 points off the bench and made two of three shots from beyond the 3-point line.

Iowa State shot 44.3 percent (27 of 61) from the field and 27.3 percent (6 of 22) from 3-point range.

Utah shot 36.1 percent (22 of 61) overall and 24.1 percent (7 of 29) from long distance.

The Utes committed 18 turnovers, compared with eight for the Cyclones. The disparity led to a 25-6 advantage in points off turnovers for Iowa State.

No. 4 Duke 76, Pitt 47

Cooper Flagg collected 19 points and 10 rebounds, Kon Knueppel scored 17 points and Duke's stout defense carried the Blue Devils (13-3, 5-0) past visiting Pitt (12-3, 3-1) in a matchup of two of the Atlantic Coast Conference's top teams in Durham, N.C.

Duke held Pitt to a miserable night on offense. The Panthers failed to score for the game's final 7:58, resulting in a game-ending 18-0 run for the Blue Devils.

Khaman Maluach added 11 points and eight rebounds for Duke, which has nine straight wins. Duke's starting backcourt chimed in with 23 points, 13 from Tyrese Proctor and 10 from Sion James. Proctor scored the game's final 10 points.

Cameron Corhen scored 11 points and pulled in seven rebounds for Pitt, which shot 31 percent (18 of 58) from the field. That included 6-for-20 on 3-pointers.

The Panthers, who are coached by former Duke player and assistant coach Jeff Capel, were denied pulling off a second consecutive road upset of Duke.

Georgia 82, No. 6 Kentucky 69

Asa Newell scored a team-high 17 points, helping Georgia (13-2, 1-1 SEC) upset Kentucky (12-3, 1-1) in Athens, Ga.

Blue Cain added 15 points and eight rebounds, while Silas Demary Jr. chipped in 14 points as Georgia won its eighth game in its last nine and its first victory over a Top 10 team since beating No. 9 Memphis in January 2020. Dakota Lefew added 11 points off the bench.

Lamont Butler led Kentucky with 20 points, followed by Brandon Garrison's 13 and Otega Oweh's 12 and seven rebounds. The Wildcats had their two-game winning streak snapped and have lost three in a row at Georgia.

Trailing by 13 at halftime, Kentucky opened the second half on a 10-4 run, stamped by Butler's layup and two free throws by Andrew Carr with 14:39 left.

Newell's layup pushed Georgia's lead to 55-46, but Oweh and Garrison hit layups to pull Kentucky within five at the 12:07 mark.

No. 7 Marquette 74, Georgetown 66

Chase Ross scored a career-high 27 points to go along with six steals, lifting Marquette (14-2, 5-0 Big East) to a victory over Georgetown (12-3, 3-1) in Milwaukee.

Ross made 7 of 12 shots from the floor – and 4 of 6 from 3-point range – to eclipse his previous career-high point total of 23, set in a 102-62 win over Stony Brook on Nov. 4.

Stevie Mitchell scored 13 points, David Joplin had 12 and Kam Jones added 11 for the Golden Eagles, who have won five games in a row overall and all 10 at home this season.

Georgetown's Malik Mack scored 18 points, and Big East Freshman of the Week Thomas Sorber collected 11 points, 13 rebounds and a season-high five blocks.

No. 14 Mississippi State 76, Vanderbilt 64

Mississippi State (14-1, 2-0) won its SEC road opener with a win at Vanderbilt (13-2, 1-1) in Nashville, Tenn.

RJ Melendez (19 points), Cameron Matthews (16) and Claudell Harris (13) led the Bulldogs in scoring.

AJ Hoggard (18), Grant Huffman (12) and Tyler Nickel (10) paced the Commodores in points.

The Bulldogs capitalized a distinct advantage in size, quickness and athleticism on both ends of the floor, snapping Vanderbilt's seven-game winning streak and handing the Commodores their first home loss.

Arizona 75, No. 21 West Virginia 56

Sophomore KJ Lewis came off the bench to score a career-high 21 points as visiting Arizona (9-5, 3-0 Big 12) toppled West Virginia (11-3, 2-1) in Morgantown, W.Va.

Jaden Bradley provided 15 points and five assists while Anthony Dell'Orso added 10 points for Arizona, which won its fifth straight and avenged a loss to West Virginia six weeks ago in the Battle 4 Atlantis tournament.

The Wildcats took an early lead and held it throughout to snap a seven-game winning streak for the Mountaineers, who were ranked in Monday's AP Top 25 poll for the first time since December 2022.

Freeing its offense with ball screens, Arizona consistently earned quality shots. The Wildcats made 50.8 percent from the floor and 7 of 20 (35 percent) from 3-point range.

No. 24 Michigan 94, No. 22 UCLA 75

Tre Donaldson's hot 3-point shooting helped Michigan recover after coughing up an 18-point lead, and the Wolverines (12-3, 4-0 Big Ten) knocked off UCLA (11-4, 2-2) in Los Angeles.

Donaldson went 6 of 10 from long range en route to a career-high 20 points.

Michigan jumped out to a 13-2 lead less than five minutes into the game, then extended the advantage to 37-19 with 5:30 remaining before halftime.

But UCLA, which came in 8-0 at Pauley Pavilion this season, whittled the deficit to 10 points by intermission. The Bruins then erupted for an 18-4 run over the first six minutes of the second half.

No. 25 Utah St. 85, San Jose St. 78

Mason Falslev scored 17 points and helped Utah State (15-1, 5-0 Mountain West) stave off a San Jose State (7-10, 0-5) rally for a road win.

Tucker Anderson added 15 points, Ian Martinez had 14, Deyton Albury 13 and Karson Templin 10 to help the newly ranked Aggies win their fifth straight game.

Donavan Yap led all scorers with 22 points and Latrell Davis added 20 off the bench for the Spartans, who lost their fourth game in a row.

San Jose State trailed by 11 with just under eight minutes left in the first half, but tied the game at 69-69 with six minutes left in the game after Davis and Yap hit consecutive 3-pointers followed by a layup from a Robert Vaihola.

WOMEN'S TOP 25 NO. 1 UCLA 83, PURDUE 49

Bruins improve to 16-0 with dominant victory

FIELD LEVEL MEDIA

Lauren Betts posted 17 points and seven rebounds to guide No. 1 UCLA to an easy 83-49 win over host Purdue on Tuesday in West Lafayette, Ind.

The win helped the Bruins (16-0, 5-0 Big Ten) match their best start to a season in program history. They began the 2019-20 campaign with 16 straight wins as well.

Betts was her usual self, as she's scored in double figures in every game this season. Timea Gardiner added 16 points off the UCLA bench, making 6 of 8 shots overall and 4 of 5 from the 3-point arc in her best performance since November.

Kiki Rice and Janiah Barker each added 11 points for the Bruins. Elina Aarnisalo had a team-high seven assists off the bench.

The only double-figure scorer for Purdue (7-8, 0-4) was Destini Lombard, who scored 16. Rashunda Jones added eight points and seven assists.

UCLA center Lauren Betts grabs a loose ball during Tuesday's game against Purdue in West Lafayette, Ind. ALEX MARTIN/JOURNAL AND COURIER - USA TODAY NETWORK

NBA

TUESDAY'S ROUNDUP

Young's halfcourt shot at buzzer lifts Hawks

FIELD LEVEL MEDIA

Trae Young hit a halfcourt 3-pointer at the buzzer to give the visiting Atlanta Hawks a 124-121 win over the Utah Jazz on Tuesday in Salt Lake City.

The Jazz tied the game with four seconds left on a 24-foot trey by Collin Sexton. Atlanta, which had no timeouts remaining, inbounded to Young, who fired successfully from midcourt. The shot was reviewed and ruled good.

Young finished with 24 points – 10 in the fourth quarter – and 20 assists to help Atlanta break a three-game losing streak. Atlanta also got 18 points, six rebounds and three blocks from Clint Capela and 17 points from De'Andre Hunter.

Utah was led by Laurie Markkanen, who matched his season high with 35 points. Sexton added 24 points and Walker Kessler had 21 points, 10 rebounds and three blocks. The Jazz fell to 2-13 at home.

Atlanta rolled to a 31-17 start before the Jazz began knocking down 3-pointers.

Atlanta Hawks guard Trae Young, right, shoots the ball past Utah Jazz guard Johnny Juzang (33) during the second half of Tuesday's game at Delta Center in Salt Lake City. CHRIS NICOLL/IMAGN IMAGES

Hornets 115, Suns 104

LaMelo Ball pumped in 32 points and Charlotte snapped a 10-game losing streak by beating visiting Phoenix.

Ball added 10 rebounds, seven assists and four steals for Charlotte. He had help from Miles Bridges with 21 points, Nick Richards with 15 points and 12 rebounds and Brandon Miller with 13 points.

The outcome was just the second victory in the last 20 games for Charlotte.

Devin Booker tried to keep the Suns in it with 39 points, marking his highest output since November. Kevin Durant had 26 and Bradley Beal, in his second game in a row coming off the bench, finished with 10 points.

Phoenix has lost five of its last six games, unable to build on Monday night's victory at Philadelphia.

Timberwolves 104, Pelicans 97

Anthony Edwards scored 32 points and visiting Minnesota spoiled Zion Williamson's return by defeating New Orleans.

Julius Randle scored 16, Naz Reid had 13 points and 12 rebounds, Nickeil Alexander-Walker scored 11 points and Donte DiVincenzo added 10 for the Timberwolves.

Dejounte Murray scored 29 points in his first game with Williamson, who scored 22 points in his return from a 27-game absence due to a strained hamstring. Williamson added six rebounds, four assists and three steals in 28 minutes.

Jose Alvarado added 13 points and Herbert Jones 10 for New Orleans.

Williamson scored four points and Murray added three as New Orleans tallied the first seven points of the second half to take a 61-54 lead. Randle made a dunk for Minnesota's first points, but the Pelicans extended the lead to eight before Edwards scored seven points to help give the Wolves a 65-64 lead.

Celtics 118, Nuggets 106

Jayson Tatum had 29 points, Kristaps Porzingis finished with 25 points and 11 rebounds and visiting Boston beat short-handed Denver.

Hornets guard LaMelo Ball, front, looks to shoot against Phoenix Suns guard Devin Booker on Tuesday in Charlotte, N.C. SAM SHARPE/IMAGN IMAGES

Jrue Holiday scored 19 points and Jaylen Brown contributed 14 for the Celtics, who used a strong fourth quarter to break open a close game.

Boston was without guard Derrick White due to an illness.

Russell Westbrook scored 26 points and grabbed nine rebounds for Denver, which played without reigning MVP Nikola Jokic and forward Aaron Gordon. Jokic (illness) missed his fourth game of the season, with Dario Saric starting in his place. Saric didn't score in his 17 minutes of court time.

Jamal Murray and Julian Strawther each scored 19 points, Michael Porter Jr. had 15 points and 10 rebounds, Peyton Watson contributed 14 points and Christian Braun finished with 12 points for the Nuggets.

Heat 114, Warriors 98

Nikola Jovic led a balanced attack with 20 points and Miami won a 3-point shooting duel on tired legs in a road win over Golden State.

Duncan Robinson did all his scoring on 4-for-5 accuracy from beyond the arc as the Heat, coming off a double-overtime defeat one night earlier in Sacramento, outscored Golden State 48-42 on 3-pointers despite taking 10 fewer attempts.

Tyler Herro bombed in three 3-pointers on a 14-point night and Alec Burks had three treys among his 11 points, helping the Heat go 16-for-40 (40 percent) from deep and win for the first time in three games since losing Jimmy Butler to a suspension.

Stephen Curry knocked down eight 3-pointers in 17 attempts en route to a game-high 31 points for the Warriors, who completed a 3-3 homestand with a second consecutive loss.

After watching a 14-point, third-quarter lead shaved to 87-86 on a Curry three-point play with 9:34 remaining in the game, the Heat got their 3-point game going one final time, ignited by back-to-back 24-footers from Jovic.

Rockets 135, Wizards 112

Jalen Green and Alperen Sengun combined for 36 points in a runaway third quarter and visiting Houston erased an early double-digit deficit to beat Washington.

Green scored 22 of his game-high 29 points while Sengun added 14 points, four rebounds and four assists in the Rockets' 40-point quarter to complete a remarkable turnaround, both for that tandem and the Rockets collectively.

Green drilled six 3-pointers in the period and combined with Sengun to shoot 15 of 23 in the third period, after they missed 14 of 20 shots in the first half while totaling 15 points.

Fred VanVleet added 19 points, 12 assists and four steals, and Amen Thompson chipped in 20 points, 15 rebounds, five assists and three steals for the Rockets. Sengun totaled 26 points, 10 boards and six assists. Green added eight rebounds.

Houston turned 18 Washington turnovers into 35 points and led by as many as 26.

Mavericks 118, Lakers 97

Quentin Grimes scored a game-high 23 points off the bench, including six 3-pointers, helping Dallas beat visiting Los Angeles.

Grimes also had nine rebounds and P.J. Washington had 22 points, while Spencer Dinwiddie scored 19 as the Mavericks snapped a five-game losing streak. In place of an injured Luka Doncic and Kyrie Irving, Jaden Hardy scored 15 points and Klay Thompson chipped in 13.

Anthony Davis led Los Angeles with 21 points and 12 boards, while LeBron James collected 18 points, 10 rebounds and eight assists. Austin Reaves had 15 points, Dalton Knecht added 13. Max Christie scored 12 and Dorian Finney-Smith had 11 as the Lakers dropped their second straight.

Leading by five at halftime, Dallas pushed its lead to 65-53 after Washington's triple capped a 10-3 Mavericks' run at the 9:45 mark of the third quarter.

James' dunk then began a 6-0 Lakers' spurt, pulling Los Angeles within six with 8:36 left.

TUESDAY'S BOX SCORES

Houston 135, Washington 112

HOUSTON (135)

Brooks 4-8 0-0 11, Thompson 7-8 6-6 20, Sengun 12-23 2-2 26, Green 10-22 2-2 29, VanVleet 7-15 3-3 19, Holiday 1-3 2-2 4, Whitmore 6-8 2-2 17, Tate 1-4 0-0 2, Adams 0-1 0-2 0, Green 2-4 3-4 7, Landale 0-0 0-0 0, Williams 0-1 0-0 0. Totals 50-97 20-23 135.

WASHINGTON (112)

George 4-10 0-0 9, Kuzma 4-9 1-4 10, Sarr 1-12 0-0 2, Carrington 4-8 0-1 12, Coulibaly 5-10 2-2 12, Kispert 7-10 4-5 23, Valanciunas 7-11 4-4 18, Butler 5-11 2-2 14, Champagnie 2-4 2-2 7, Gill 0-1 0-0 0, Baldwin Jr. 2-2 0-0 5, Holmes 0-1 0-0 0. Totals 41-89 15-20 112.

HOU	20	37	40	38	–	135
WAS	30	25	24	33	–	112

3-Point Goals: Houston 15-38 (Green 7-15, Whitmore 3-3, Brooks 3-4, VanVleet 2-9, Tate 0-1, Holiday 0-1, Williams 0-1, Green 0-2, Sengun 0-2), Washington 15-40 (Kispert 5-7, Carrington 4-6, Butler 2-4, Baldwin Jr. 1-1, Champagnie 1-2, Kuzma 1-4, George 1-7, Gill 0-1, Coulibaly 0-3, Sarr 0-5). Fouled Out: None. Rebounds: Houston 49 (Thompson 15), Washington 43 (Sarr 9). Assists: Houston 31 (VanVleet 12), Washington 21 (Butler, Carrington 5). Total Fouls: Houston 17, Washington 19. A: 12,930 (20,308)

Charlotte 115, Phoenix 104

PHOENIX (104)

Dunn 3-8 0-0 6, Durant 8-18 9-10 26, Plumlee 0-1 0-0 0, Booker 14-25 9-9 39, Jones 2-6 0-0 4, Beal 5-13 0-0 10, Allen 3-7 0-0 9, Nurkic 3-6 0-0 8, Morris 1-5 0-0 2, Ighodaro 0-3 0-0 0, Okogie 0-0 0-0 0. Totals 39-92 18-19 104.

CHARLOTTE (115)

Bridges 8-17 3-3 21, Green 1-3 2-2 5, Williams 2-7 5-5 9, Ball 12-28 3-5 32, Miller 5-16 0-0 13, Martin 1-5 2-2 4, Richards 4-6 7-8 15, Smith Jr. 3-8 0-0 8, Micic 1-5 2-2 4, Salaun 1-3 2-2 4. Totals 38-98 26-29 115.

PHX	29	17	37	21	–	104
CHA	22	37	29	27	–	115

3-Point Goals: Phoenix 8-33 (Allen 3-6, Nurkic 2-3, Booker 2-8, Durant 1-6, Beal 0-2, Morris 0-2, Jones 0-2, Dunn 0-4), Charlotte 13-47 (Ball 5-16, Miller 3-12, Bridges 2-5, Smith Jr. 2-6, Green 1-2, Micic 0-2, Martin 0-2, Salaun 0-2). Fouled Out: None. Rebounds: Phoenix 42 (Plumlee 13), Charlotte 59 (Richards 12). Assists: Phoenix 27 (Booker 10), Charlotte 23 (Ball 7). Total Fouls: Phoenix 23, Charlotte 19. A: 16,647 (19,077)

Dallas 118, L.A. Lakers 97

L.A. LAKERS (97)

Hachimura 3-5 0-0 6, James 6-12 5-6 18, Davis 7-18 7-9 21, Christie 5-9 1-1 12, Reaves 5-14 1-2 15, Finney-Smith 3-4 2-2 11, Vincent 0-4 0-0 0, Knecht 5-8 1-2 13, Hayes 0-1 1-2 1, James 0-0 0-0 0. Totals 34-75 18-24 97.

DALLAS (118)

Marshall 2-11 2-2 7, Washington 9-14 1-2 22, Lively II 3-3 1-2 7, Dinwiddie 8-15 2-2 19, Thompson 5-10 0-0 13, Kleber 2-3 0-0 5, Grimes 8-17 1-2 23, Hardy 6-11 0-0 15, Prosper 0-0 3-4 3, Powell 0-0 0-0 0, Williams 2-2 0-0 4. Totals 45-86 10-14 118.

LAL	27	23	26	21	–	97
DAL	24	31	34	29	–	118

3-Point Goals: L.A. Lakers 11-35 (Reaves 4-11, Finney-Smith 3-4, Knecht 2-5, James 1-4, Christie 1-4, Davis 0-2, Hachimura 0-2, Vincent 0-3), Dallas 18-38 (Grimes 6-11, Washington 3-3, Thompson 3-6, Hardy 3-6, Kleber 1-1, Dinwiddie 1-5, Marshall 1-6). Fouled Out: None. Rebounds: L.A. Lakers 33 (Davis 12), Dallas 44 (Grimes 9). Assists: L.A. Lakers 20 (James 8), Dallas 29 (Dinwiddie 8). Total Fouls: L.A. Lakers 13, Dallas 16. A: 20,126 (19,200)

Minnesota 104, New Orleans 97

MINNESOTA (104)

McDaniels 2-9 0-0 5, Randle 6-11 3-5 16, Gobert 3-4 1-2 7, DiVincenzo 4-12 0-0 10, Edwards 10-21 5-6 32, Conley 2-4 3-4 8, Reid 6-16 0-1 13, Alexander-Walker 4-9 1-1 11, Minott 1-3 0-0 2. Totals 38-89 13-19 104.

NEW ORLEANS (97)

Jones 3-9 2-2 10, Williamson 9-15 4-9 22, Missi 1-7 0-0 2, McCollum 1-14 2-3 5, Murray 12-20 3-6 29, Boston Jr. 1-6 2-2 5, Robinson-Earl 2-6 0-0 5, Alvarado 4-11 2-2 13, Theis 1-2 0-0 3, Hawkins 1-4 0-0 3. Totals 35-94 15-24 97.

MIN	34	20	29	21	–	104
NOP	33	21	21	22	–	97

3-Point Goals: Minnesota 15-44 (Edwards 7-11, Alexander-Walker 2-6, DiVincenzo 2-8, Conley 1-3, Randle 1-4, Reid 1-5, McDaniels 1-6, Minott 0-1), New Orleans 12-41 (Alvarado 3-8, Jones 2-5, Murray 2-8, Theis 1-1, Robinson-Earl 1-3, Boston Jr. 1-3, Hawkins 1-4, McCollum 1-7, Williamson 0-2). Fouled Out: None. Rebounds: Minnesota 53 (Gobert 14), New Orleans 46 (Missi 9). Assists: Minnesota 26 (DiVincenzo 7), New Orleans 23 (Murray 6). Total Fouls: Minnesota 17, New Orleans 18. A: 16,282 (16,867)

Miami 114, Golden State 98

MIAMI (114)

Highsmith 2-4 0-0 5, Jaquez Jr. 7-12 3-4 18, Adebayo 9-14 0-1 19, Herro 4-14 3-3 14, Rozier 4-12 0-0 9, Jovic 8-17 2-3 20, Burks 3-6 2-3 11, Robinson 4-6 0-0 12, Ware 2-6 2-3 6, Johnson 0-0 0-0 0, Christopher 0-0 0-0 0, Larsson 0-0 0-0 0. Totals 43-91 12-17 114.

GOLDEN STATE (98)

Green 3-9 1-1 7, Wiggins 4-10 0-0 9, Jackson-Davis 9-12 1-1 19, Curry 11-22 1-1 31, Schroder 2-10 0-0 5, Anderson 2-7 0-0 5, Hield 4-12 1-2 11, Waters III 3-8 0-0 6, Moody 1-6 0-0 3, Spencer 1-1 0-0 2, Santos 0-1 0-0 0. Totals 40-98 4-5 98.

MIA	29	32	23	30	–	114
GSW	23	25	30	20	–	98

3-Point Goals: Miami 16-40 (Robinson 4-5, Burks 3-6, Herro 3-9, Jovic 2-8, Adebayo 1-1, Highsmith 1-3, Jaquez Jr. 1-3, Rozier 1-4, Ware 0-1), Golden State 14-50 (Curry 8-17, Hield 2-9, Anderson 1-2, Wiggins 1-3, Moody 1-4, Schroder 1-7, Santos 0-1, Green 0-3, Waters III 0-4). Fouled Out: None. Rebounds: Miami 48 (Adebayo 9), Golden State 53 (Green 10). Assists: Miami 32 (Robinson 8), Golden State 28 (Green 10). Total Fouls: Miami 9, Golden State 15. A: 18,064 (18,064)

Atlanta 124, Utah 121

ATLANTA (124)

Krejci 5-6 0-0 13, Risacher 6-14 0-0 14, Capela 9-11 0-0 18, Daniels 7-12 0-0 16, Young 6-16 9-10 24, Bogdanovic 4-10 0-0 11, Hunter 5-11 3-5 17, Okongwu 1-5 0-0 2, Mathews 4-13 0-0 9. Totals 47-98 12-15 124.

UTAH (121)

Juzang 4-11 0-0 11, Markkanen 11-21 5-6 35, Kessler 8-11 5-6 21, Collier 1-6 0-0 3, Sexton 7-16 8-9 24, Williams 1-6 2-2 4, Mills 5-14 0-0 13, Eubanks 1-4 2-2 4, Filipowski 1-5 0-0 3, Potter 1-2 0-0 3. Totals 40-96 22-25 121.

ATL	36	29	28	31	–	124
UTA	32	30	27	32	–	121

3-Point Goals: Atlanta 18-44 (Hunter 4-7, Krejci 3-4, Bogdanovic 3-7, Young 3-10, Daniels 2-4, Risacher 2-4, Mathews 1-8), Utah 19-48 (Markkanen 8-15, Juzang 3-8, Mills 3-9, Sexton 2-3, Potter 1-2, Collier 1-4, Filipowski 1-5, Williams 0-2). Fouled Out: None. Rebounds: Atlanta 44 (Okongwu 9), Utah 47 (Kessler 10). Assists: Atlanta 35 (Young 20), Utah 25 (Collier 9). Total Fouls: Atlanta 22, Utah 17. A: 18,175 (19,911)

Boston 118, Denver 106

BOSTON (118)

Horford 3-5 0-0 9, Tatum 11-23 6-6 29, Porzingis 9-18 6-8 25, Brown 6-13 2-2 14, Holiday 6-12 4-4 19, Pritchard 1-6 0-0 3, Hauser 3-5 0-0 9, Kornet 1-1 0-0 2, Queta 4-5 0-0 8, Springer 0-0 0-0 0. Totals 44-88 18-20 118.

DENVER (106)

Braun 5-10 0-0 12, Porter Jr. 5-13 3-4 15, Saric 0-2 0-0 0, Murray 8-17 2-2 19, Westbrook 9-18 4-5 26, Watson 5-9 2-2 14, Strawther 8-15 0-0 19, Jordan 0-1 1-2 1, Nnaji 0-2 0-0 0. Totals 40-87 12-15 106.

BOS	37	20	31	30	–	118
DEN	25	32	26	23	–	106

3-Point Goals: Boston 12-35 (Horford 3-5, Hauser 3-5, Holiday 3-7, Porzingis 1-3, Pritchard 1-5, Tatum 1-9, Brown 0-1), Denver 14-36 (Westbrook 4-9, Strawther 3-6, Watson 2-3, Braun 2-5, Porter Jr. 2-7, Murray 1-5, Saric 0-1). Fouled Out: None. Rebounds: Boston 41 (Porzingis 11), Denver 39 (Porter Jr. 10). Assists: Boston 30 (Brown 8), Denver 22 (Westbrook 6). Total Fouls: Boston 13, Denver 17. A: 19,904 (19,155)

League Leaders

Scoring Averages

	GP	PTS	AVG
Antetokounmpo, MIL	28	884	31.6
Jokic, DEN	31	977	31.5
Gilgeous-Alexander, OKC	35	1095	31.3
Tatum, BOS	33	928	28.1
Durant, PHX	24	658	27.4
Fox, SAC	35	933	26.7
Davis, LAL	33	857	26.0
Edwards, MIN	35	897	25.6
Wembanyama, SAS	31	794	25.6
Maxey, PHI	28	711	25.4
Brunson, NYK	36	912	25.3
Towns, NYK	34	859	25.3
Lillard, MIL	27	668	24.7
Cunningham, DET	32	780	24.4
Irving, DAL	30	729	24.3
Brown, BOS	29	704	24.3
Booker, PHX	29	698	24.1
James, LAL	32	769	24.0
Herro, MIA	34	811	23.9
Powell, LAC	29	682	23.5

NHL

TUESDAY'S ROUNDUP

Jets goalie Hellebuyck gets his 300th win

FIELD LEVEL MEDIA

Connor Hellebuyck made 26 saves to win his 300th career game as the Winnipeg Jets defeated the visiting Nashville Predators 5-2.

Morgan Barron, Josh Morrissey, Kyle Connor, Gabriel Vilardi, and Nino Niederreiter were the goal scorers for Winnipeg. Mark Scheifele added two assists, while Dylan DeMelo, Adam Lowry, Ville Heinola, and Nikolaj Ehlers each had one assist.

Roman Josi recorded a goal and an assist for Nashville, while Filip Forsberg also scored. Jonathan Marchessault and Vinnie Hinostroza contributed assists. Juuse Saros made 25 stops.

At 6:30 into the first period, the Jets opened the scoring when the puck squirted over the line after a scrum in the corner of the Predators' net. Barron was the last Jet to touch the puck after Nick Blankenburg inadvertently swiped it into his own net.

Sixteen seconds later, Morrissey fired a shot right from the top of the circle to make it 2-0 for Winnipeg.

Jets goaltender Connor Hellebuyck (37) makes a save against the Nashville Predators on Tuesday in Winnipeg. JAMES CAREY LAUDER/IMAGN IMAGES

Red Wings 3, Senators 2, OT

Patrick Kane scored an overtime goal with 2:39 left as the Detroit Red Wings won their fifth straight game by defeating the road-weary Ottawa Senators 3-2 on Tuesday night.

Dylan Larkin won a faceoff in Detroit's offensive zone and passed it behind him to Kane, who easily snapped the game-winner past Anton Forsberg. It came on a power play, as Jake Sanderson was penalized 11 seconds earlier for hooking Moritz Seider.

Larkin also scored a power-play goal in the first period, extending his goal streak to four games and his point streak to six games. Joe Veleno had the other regulation goal for Detroit.

Alex Lyon started in goal for Detroit but suffered an upper-body injury during the first period. Cam Talbot replaced him, and they combined for 31 saves.

Thomas Chabot and Brady Tkachuk scored in regulation for Ottawa. Forsberg made 30 saves.

Stars 5, Rangers 4, OT

Jamie Benn scored a power-play goal 2:17 into overtime as Dallas ran its winning streak to five games by rallying from an early three-goal deficit for a victory over host New York.

Dallas defenseman Thomas Harley scored the game-tying goal with 2:39 remaining in regulation, and Benn kept the winning streak alive when he went to the front of the net and re-directed a pass from Jason Robertson past New York goaltender Jonathan Quick. The goal came after Rangers forward Artemi Panarin was hit with a hooking penalty 25 seconds into the extra period.

Robertson scored in the second period for the Stars, while Matt Duchene and Evgenii Dadonov scored in the first to start the comeback.

Vincent Trocheck and Alexis Lafreniere scored two goals apiece as the Rangers dropped to 6-16-1 over their past 23 games.

Dallas goalie Jake Oettinger made 21 saves while Quick allowed five goals on 39 shots.

Flames 3, Ducks 2, OT

Jonathan Huberdeau scored the overtime winner and MacKenzie Weegar collected one goal and one assist as visiting Calgary claimed an overtime victory over Anaheim.

Nazem Kadri also scored for the Flames, who had their moms on a road trip to Southern California that also includes a clash with the Los Angeles Kings. Joel Hanley collected a pair of assists and goaltender Dustin Wolf made 26 saves in an excellent goaltending battle.

While the Flames enjoyed a rare extra-time power play, Anaheim's Jacob Trouba tried to clear the puck from behind his net, but the puck bounced to the front of the net for Huberdeau to bat out of the air at 2:05. That sent his mother, Josée, celebrating with the other matriarchs.

The Flames have won nine consecutive visits to Anaheim and are on a 12-2-1 run against the Ducks.

Alex Killorn and Mason McTavish scored for the Ducks, who were without top scorer Troy Terry due to the pending birth of a child. Goalie John Gibson stopped 30 shots.

Blue Jackets 4, Penguins 3, SO

Kent Johnson and Kirill Marchenko each scored in the shootout as Columbus rallied to snap a 15-game winless skid in Pittsburgh with a victory over the Penguins.

Johnson beat Tristan Jarry between the pads in the first round of the shootout and Marchenko did the same in the third to end the game.

Columbus' Dmitri Voronkov scored twice to boost his goal total to nine in his last seven games and Adam Fantilli converted from the slot to forge a 3-3 tie with 2:36 remaining in the third period.

Marchenko had two assists and Elvis Merzlikins made 20 saves for the Blue Jackets, who recorded their first win in the Steel City since Nov. 13, 2015. They were 0-10-5 in the previous 15 games. Overall, Columbus improved to 6-2-1 in its last nine games.

Pittsburgh's Rickard Rakell scored twice in the third period to reach the 20-goal plateau for the fifth time in his career.

Lightning 3, Hurricanes 2

Tampa Bay's Brayden Point netted a dazzling game-winning goal in the final minute of regulation as the Lightning snapped a four-game losing streak with a victory over visiting Carolina.

Off a fine feed from Nikita Kucherov, Point caught the puck slashing through the slot, spun against his forehand and scored his team-leading 24th goal with 52 seconds left.

Brandon Hagel hit the net and Nick Paul reached double figures in goals with his first power-play tally of the season. Darren Raddysh recorded two assists as the Lightning recorded their second win over Carolina to win the season series.

Goaltender Andrei Vasilevskiy made 31 saves to break a personal two-game losing streak and won for the fourth time in the past six starts (4-1-1) versus the Hurricanes.

Maple Leafs 3, Flyers 2

Matthew Knies scored the go-ahead goal in the third period as Toronto skated to a victory over host Philadelphia.

Auston Matthews added a goal and an assist for the Maple Leafs, giving him seven points in three games since returning from an upper-body injury. Joseph Woll made 30 saves for Toronto, while John Tavares chipped in with a goal and an assist for the visitors.

The Maple Leafs have won five games in a row. They swept this week's home-and-home series with the Flyers after posting a 3-2 overtime victory north of the border on Sunday.

Travis Konecny scored twice in this one for Philadelphia, which has lost four of its last five games. Ivan Fedotov finished with 14 saves for the hosts.

The decisive goal came with 6:39 left shortly after a faceoff in the Maple Leafs' offensive zone. Morgan Rielly, who scored the overtime goal in Sunday's contest, was involved in the pivotal action once again.

Wild 6, Blues 4

Matt Boldy scored the go-ahead goal with 16:03 left in the third period, and Minnesota rallied for a win over St. Louis in Saint Paul, Minn.

Jake Middleton and Marcus Johansson each finished with a goal and an assist for Minnesota, which has won four in a row and six of its last seven. Zach Bogosian, Jon Merrill and Joel Eriksson Ek also scored, while Mats Zuccarello and Ryan Hartman each had two assists.

Jordan Kyrou scored his team-high 18th goal for St. Louis, which has lost two straight games by the same score. Pavel Buchnevich, Jake Neighbours and Robert Thomas added one goal apiece, and Dylan Holloway and Justin Faulk both chipped in a pair of assists.

Wild goaltender Marc-Andre Fleury entered the game in the second period and stopped all 16 shots he faced. He relieved Filip Gustavsson, who allowed four goals on 18 shots.

Golden Knights 4, Sharks 2

Mark Stone had a goal and an assist as visiting Vegas continued its dominance of San Jose.

Zach Whitecloud, Victor Olofsson and Tomas Hertl also scored goals and Shea Theodore added two assists for Vegas, which won its third straight game and for the ninth time in 10 games. The Golden Knights, who lead the NHL with 59 points, improved to 27-2-5 all-time against the Sharks in the regular season, including 14-0-3 in San Jose.

Ilya Samsonov made 20 saves to win his sixth consecutive start for Vegas, which also improved to 22-3-2 in games against Western Conference teams and 14-2-1 against Pacific Division foes.

William Eklund had a goal and an assist and Timothy Liljegren also scored for San Jose, which had a two-game win streak snapped, Alexandar Georgiev finished with 38 saves.

Oilers 4, Bruins 0

Adam Henrique scored in each of the first two periods and Connor McDavid netted a breakaway goal to lead visiting Edmonton past Boston.

Henrique scored the only goal Edmonton needed at 6:33 of the first period before adding another in the second to ensure the team's fourth consecutive win and 15th in 19 games (15-3-1).

Viktor Arvidsson also scored for the Oilers, while Brett Kulak had two assists.

Stuart Skinner made 26 saves but shared the shutout with Calvin Pickard after taking a hit on Boston defenseman Nikita Zadorov's hard net drive with 5:25 left in the opening frame.

Pickard did not have to make a save before Skinner returned to start the second.

TUESDAY'S SUMMARIES

Dallas 5, N.Y. Rangers 4 (OT)

Dallas	2	1	1	1 –	5
N.Y. Rangers	3	0	1	0 –	4

First Period–1, N.Y. Rangers, Lafreniere 10 (Panarin, Lindgren), 6:56. 1, N.Y. Rangers, Trocheck 12 (Borgen, Panarin), 9:55. 2, N.Y. Rangers, Lafreniere 11 (Panarin, Trocheck), 11:24. 1, Dallas, Duchene 16 (Lindell), 12:57. 1, Dallas, Dadonov 11 (Bourque, Harley), 15:56. Penalties–Schneider, NYR (Holding), 14:21.
Second Period–1, Dallas, Robertson 10 (Dadonov, Hintz), 13:14. Penalties–Lundkvist, DAL (Hooking), 1:12.
Third Period–2, N.Y. Rangers, Trocheck 13 (Zibanejad, Fox), 12:56. 1, Dallas, Harley 6 (Steel), 17:21. Penalties–Harley, DAL (Delay of Game), 11:20.
Overtime–1, Dallas, Benn 11 (Robertson, Harley), 2:17. Penalties–Panarin, NYR (Hooking), 0:25.
Shots on Goal–Dallas 19-10-10-1–40. N.Y. Rangers 8-9-8-0–25.
Power-play opportunities–Dallas 2 of 2; N.Y. Rangers 1 of 2.
Goalies–Dallas, Oettinger 20-9-1 (25 shots-21 saves). N.Y. Rangers, Quick (40-35).
A–17,528 (18,200).

Edmonton 4, Boston 0

Edmonton	1	2	1 –	4
Boston	0	0	0 –	0

First Period–1, Edmonton, Henrique 4 (Perry, Kulak), 6:33. Penalties–Zadorov, BOS (Goaltender Interference), 14:35.
Second Period–1, Edmonton, McDavid 16 (Nugent-Hopkins), 11:11. 2, Edmonton, Henrique 5 (Skinner, Hyman), 16:35. Penalties–Draisaitl, EDM (Interference), 6:23. Perry, EDM (Fighting), 10:37. Frederic, BOS (Roughing), 10:37. Frederic, BOS (Fighting), 10:37.
Third Period–1, Edmonton, Arvidsson 5 (Kulak), 16:25. Penalties–Ekholm, EDM (Interference), 6:27. Marchand, BOS (Cross-checking), 13:20.
Shots on Goal–Edmonton 14-15-10–39. Boston 4-8-14–26.
Power-play opportunities–Edmonton 1 of 3; Boston 0 of 2.
Goalies–Edmonton, Skinner 16-8-3 (26 shots-26 saves), Pickard (0-0). Boston, Swayman 13-14-3 (38-35). A–17,850 (17,565).

Toronto 3, Philadelphia 2

Toronto	0	2	1 –	3
Philadelphia	1	1	0 –	2

First Period–1, Philadelphia, Konecny 19 (Couturier, York), 8:19. Penalties–Dewar, TOR (Fighting), 4:47. Farabee, PHI (Fighting), 4:47. Drysdale, PHI (Holding), 10:55. Tippett, PHI (Boarding), 16:22.
Second Period–1, Toronto, Tavares 20 (Matthews, Marner), 1:19. 2, Philadelphia, Konecny 20 (Cates), 7:14. 1, Toronto, Matthews 13 (Marner, Tavares), 7:55. Penalties–York, PHI (High-sticking), 0:24. Marner, TOR (Hooking), 5:16. Foerster, PHI (High-sticking), 5:54. Kampf, TOR (Hooking), 11:10.
Third Period–1, Toronto, Knies 16 (Rielly, Myers), 13:21. Penalties–Pacioretty, TOR (Delay of Game), 14:34. Knies, TOR (Hooking), 19:12. Drysdale, PHI (Tripping), 19:47.
Shots on Goal–Toronto 2-7-8–17. Philadelphia 10-9-13–32.
Power-play opportunities–Toronto 1 of 4; Philadelphia 0 of 4.
Goalies–Toronto, Woll 14-6-0 (32 shots-30 saves). Philadelphia, Fedotov 4-5-2 (17-14).
A–18,058 (19,523).

Minnesota 6, St. Louis 4

St. Louis	1	3	0 –	4
Minnesota	2	1	3 –	6

First Period–1, Minnesota, Bogosian 3 (Middleton, Hartman), 1:23. 1, Minnesota, Merrill 1 (Brodin), 2:12. 1, St. Louis, Buchnevich 10 (Holloway, Faulk), 13:26. Penalties–None.
Second Period–1, St. Louis, Kyrou 18 (Faulk, Holloway), 1:24. 1, St. Louis, Neighbours 11 (Sundqvist, Bolduc), 2:51. 1, St. Louis, Thomas 9 (Suter, Saad), 4:33. 1, Minnesota, Eriksson Ek 7 (Hartman, Johansson), 9:41. Penalties–Merrill, MIN (Tripping), 1:17.
Third Period–1, Minnesota, Middleton 6 (Zuccarello), 1:16. 1, Minnesota, Boldy 15 (Zuccarello), 3:57. 1, Minnesota, Johansson 5, 19:24. Penalties–None.
Shots on Goal–St. Louis 14-6-13–33. Minnesota 9-11-6–26.
Power-play opportunities–St. Louis 1 of 1; Minnesota 0 of 0.
Goalies–St. Louis, Binnington 11-15-3 (25 shots-20 saves). Minnesota, Gustavsson (18-14), Fleury 8-3-1 (15-15). A–18,464 (18,064).

Columbus 4, Pittsburgh 3 (SO)

Columbus	1	0	2	1 –	4
Pittsburgh	0	1	2	0 –	3

Columbus won shootout 2-0
First Period–1, Columbus, Voronkov 16 (Marchenko, Monahan), 3:20. Penalties–Karlsson, PIT (Interference), 2:53. Voronkov, CBJ (Hooking), 19:08.
Second Period–1, Pittsburgh, Bunting 13 (Crosby, Karlsson), 0:51. Penalties–None.
Third Period–1, Pittsburgh, Rakell 19 (Karlsson, Grzelcyk), 0:24. 2, Pittsburgh, Rakell 20 (Crosby), 10:09. 2, Columbus, Voronkov 17 (Marchenko, Fantilli), 12:05. 1, Columbus, Fantilli 9 (Johnson, Werenski), 17:24. Penalties–Lizotte, PIT (Slashing), 16:09.
Overtime–None. Penalties–None.
Shootout–Columbus 2 (Johnson G, Fantilli NG, Marchenko G), Pittsburgh 0 (Rust NG, Crosby NG).
Shots on Goal–Columbus 7-10-11-1–29. Pittsburgh 3-11-7-2–23.
Power-play opportunities–Columbus 2 of 2; Pittsburgh 1 of 1.
Goalies–Columbus, Merzlikins 14-10-3 (23 shots-20 saves). Pittsburgh, Jarry (29-26).
A–16,060 (18,087).

Tampa Bay 3, Carolina 2

Carolina	0	1	1 –	2
Tampa Bay	1	1	1 –	3

First Period–1, Tampa Bay, Hagel 18 (Raddysh), 16:38. Penalties–Chatfield, CAR (Holding), 12:09.
Second Period–1, Carolina, Svechnikov 13 (Staal), 6:31. 1, Tampa Bay, Paul 10 (Raddysh, Geekie), 9:17. Penalties–Smith, CAR (Tripping), 3:57. Burns, CAR (Hooking), 7:18. Kucherov, TBL (Hooking), 18:28.
Third Period–1, Carolina, Staal 5 (Burns), 9:56. 1, Tampa Bay, Point 24 (Kucherov, Guentzel), 19:08. Penalties–Aho, CAR (Slashing), 20:00. Aho, CAR (Roughing), 20:00. Cirelli, TBL (Roughing), 20:00. Hagel, TBL (Roughing), 20:00.
Shots on Goal–Carolina 10-16-7–33. Tampa Bay 11-14-8–33.
Power-play opportunities–Carolina 0 of 1; Tampa Bay 1 of 3.
Goalies–Carolina, Kochetkov 15-9-1 (33 shots-30 saves). Tampa Bay, Vasilevskiy 17-12-1 (33-31).
A–19,092 (19,092).

Winnipeg 5, Nashville 2

Nashville	0	1	1 –	2
Winnipeg	3	0	2 –	5

First Period–1, Winnipeg, Barron 4, 6:30. 1, Winnipeg, Morrissey 5 (DeMelo, Lowry), 6:46. 1, Winnipeg, Connor 23 (Scheifele, Heinola), 18:36. Penalties–Coghlan, WPG (High-sticking), 11:59.
Second Period–1, Nashville, Forsberg 10 (Josi, Marchessault), 16:45. Penalties–Pionk, WPG (Holding), 10:57. Pionk, WPG (Delay of Game), 16:18.
Third Period–1, Winnipeg, Vilardi 19 (Ehlers, Scheifele), 7:51. 1, Nashville, Josi 8 (Hinostroza, Nyquist), 9:25. 1, Winnipeg, Niederreiter 11 (Lowry), 17:55. Penalties–Hinostroza, NSH (Tripping), 2:43. Kupari, WPG (High-sticking), 2:43. Barron, NSH (Holding), 7:42. Stanley, WPG (High-sticking), 10:31. Connor, WPG (Hooking), 13:05.
Shots on Goal–Nashville 10-6-12–28. Winnipeg 11-10-9–30.
Power-play opportunities–Nashville 1 of 7; Winnipeg 1 of 1.
Goalies–Nashville, Saros 9-17-6 (29 shots-25 saves). Winnipeg, Hellebuyck 25-6-2 (28-26).
A–13,105 (15,294).

Detroit 3, Ottawa 2 (OT)

Ottawa	0	2	0	0 –	2
Detroit	1	0	1	1 –	3

First Period–1, Detroit, Larkin 17 (DeBrincat, Raymond), 8:30. Penalties–Tkachuk, OTT (Roughing), 7:07. Tkachuk, OTT (High-sticking), 11:08.
Second Period–1, Ottawa, Chabot 3 (Jensen, Cousins), 12:25. 1, Ottawa, Tkachuk 18 (Sanderson, Stuetzle), 19:05. Penalties–Edvinsson, DET (Tripping), 10:20. Holl, DET (Roughing), 18:12.
Third Period–1, Detroit, Veleno 5 (Edvinsson, Motte), 5:00. Penalties–None.
Overtime–1, Detroit, Kane 9 (Larkin), 2:21. Penalties–Sanderson, OTT (Hooking), 2:10.
Shots on Goal–Ottawa 10-13-10-0–33. Detroit 14-8-8-3–33.
Power-play opportunities–Ottawa 1 of 2; Detroit 2 of 3.
Goalies–Ottawa, Forsberg (33 shots-30 saves). Detroit, Talbot 8-9-2 (23-21), Lyon (10-10).
A–19,515 (20,000).

Calgary 3, Anaheim 2 (OT)

Calgary	1	1	0	1 –	3
Anaheim	0	1	1	0 –	2

First Period–1, Calgary, Weegar 5 (Coleman, Hanley), 19:04. Penalties–Johnston, ANA (High-sticking), 2:50. Huberdeau, CGY (Tripping), 13:19.
Second Period–1, Anaheim, Killorn 8 (Lundestrom, LaCombe), 8:34. 1, Calgary, Kadri 15 (Weegar, Hanley), 12:44. Penalties–Pelletier, CGY (Roughing), 6:34. Helleson, ANA (Kneeing Major), 6:34. Helleson, ANA (Game Misconduct), 6:34.
Third Period–1, Anaheim, McTavish 6 (Gauthier, Mintyukov), 7:36. Penalties–Bean, CGY (Hooking), 6:17.
Overtime–1, Calgary, Huberdeau 17 (Coronato), 2:05. Penalties–Mintyukov, ANA (Interference), 1:35.
Shots on Goal–Calgary 12-9-8-4–33. Anaheim 11-5-11-1–28.
Power-play opportunities–Calgary 1 of 3; Anaheim 1 of 2.
Goalies–Calgary, Wolf 13-6-2 (28 shots-26 saves). Anaheim, Gibson (33-30).
A–17,396 (17,174).

Vegas 4, San Jose 2

Vegas	2	0	2 –	4
San Jose	0	1	1 –	2

First Period–1, Vegas, Stone 11 (Theodore, Karlsson), 8:39. 1, Vegas, Whitecloud 3 (Howden, Kolesar), 10:08. Penalties–None.
Second Period–1, San Jose, Eklund 8 (Graf, Wennberg), 9:49. Penalties–Hertl, VGK (Interference), 8:20. Zetterlund, SJS (Slashing), 19:57.
Third Period–1, Vegas, Olofsson 9 (Eichel, Theodore), 1:10. 1, San Jose, Liljegren 4 (Eklund, Zetterlund), 10:41. 1, Vegas, Hertl 11 (Stone), 18:40. Penalties–Olofsson, VGK (Hooking), 9:21.
Shots on Goal–Vegas 13-18-11–42. San Jose 12-4-6–22.
Power-play opportunities–Vegas 1 of 1; San Jose 2 of 2.
Goalies–Vegas, Samsonov 11-3-1 (22 shots-20 saves). San Jose, Georgiev 9-12-0 (41-38).
A–10,802 (17,562).

SCOREBOARD

BETTING LINE

NFL

Saturday

FAVORITE	LINE	O/U	UNDERDOG
LA Chargers	3	42.5	HOUSTON
BALTIMORE	10	43.5	Pittsburgh

Sunday

FAVORITE	LINE	O/U	UNDERDOG
BUFFALO	8.5	47	Denver
PHILADELPHIA	4.5	45.5	Green Bay
TAMPA BAY	3	50.5	Washington

Monday

FAVORITE	LINE	O/U	UNDERDOG
Minnesota	1.5	47	LA RAMS

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Thursday

FAVORITE	LINE	O/U	UNDERDOG
Notre Dame	2.5	45.5	PENN STATE

Friday

FAVORITE	LINE	O/U	UNDERDOG
Ohio State	6	53.5	TEXAS

All times Eastern

NFL

Playoffs

Saturday's Games

L.A. Chargers at Houston, 4:30 p.m., CBS
Pittsburgh at Baltimore, 8 p.m., Amazon

Sunday, Jan. 12

Denver at Buffalo, 1 p.m., CBS
Green Bay at Philadelphia, 4:30 p.m., Fox
Washington at Tampa Bay, 8 p.m., NBC

Monday, Jan. 13

Minnesota at L.A. Rams, 8 p.m., ESPN/ABC

NBA

EASTERN CONFERENCE

Atlantic Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Boston	27	10	.730	–
N.Y. Knicks	24	13	.649	3
Philadelphia	14	20	.412	11½
Brooklyn	13	23	.361	13½
Toronto	8	28	.222	18½

Southeast Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Orlando	22	16	.579	–
Miami	18	17	.514	2½
Atlanta	19	18	.514	2½
Charlotte	8	27	.229	12½
Washington	6	28	.176	14

Central Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Cleveland	31	4	.886	–
Milwaukee	18	16	.529	12½
Indiana	19	18	.514	13
Detroit	18	18	.500	13½
Chicago	17	19	.472	14½

WESTERN CONFERENCE

Southwest Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Houston	24	12	.667	–
Memphis	24	13	.649	½
Dallas	21	16	.568	3½
San Antonio	18	18	.500	6
New Orleans	7	30	.189	17½

Northwest Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
Oklahoma City	30	5	.857	–
Denver	20	15	.571	10
Minnesota	19	17	.528	11½
Portland	12	23	.343	18
Utah	9	26	.257	21

Pacific Division

	W	L	Pct	GB
L.A. Clippers	20	16	.556	–
L.A. Lakers	20	16	.556	–
Golden State	18	18	.500	2
Sacramento	18	19	.486	2½
Phoenix	16	19	.457	3½

Monday's Scores

Detroit 118, Portland 115
Phoenix 109, Philadelphia 99
Indiana 113, Brooklyn 99
Milwaukee 128, Toronto 104
Orlando 103, N.Y. Knicks 94
Chicago 114, San Antonio 110
Memphis 119, Dallas 104
Minnesota 108, L.A. Clippers 106
Sacramento 123, Miami 118, 2OT

Tuesday's Scores

Charlotte 115, Phoenix 104
Houston 135, Washington 112
Dallas 118, L.A. Lakers 97
Minnesota 104, New Orleans 97
Atlanta 124, Utah 121
Boston 118, Denver 106
Miami 114, Golden State 98

Wednesday's Games

Oklahoma City at Cleveland, 7 p.m.
Chicago at Indiana, 7 p.m.
Washington at Philadelphia, 7 p.m.
Detroit at Brooklyn, 7:30 p.m.
Toronto at N.Y. Knicks, 7:30 p.m.
Portland at New Orleans, 8 p.m.
L.A. Clippers at Denver, 9 p.m.
San Antonio at Milwaukee, 9:30 p.m.

Thursday's Games

Toronto at Cleveland, 7 p.m.
Golden State at Detroit, 7 p.m.
Minnesota at Orlando, 7 p.m.
Houston at Memphis, 8 p.m.
Portland at Dallas, 8:30 p.m.
Miami at Utah, 9 p.m.
Atlanta at Phoenix, 9 p.m.
Charlotte at L.A. Lakers, 10:30 p.m.

NHL

Eastern Conference

Atlantic Division

	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Toronto	27	13	2	56	132	115
Florida	24	15	2	50	136	127
Boston	20	18	5	45	111	135
Tampa Bay	21	15	2	44	140	107
Ottawa	19	17	3	41	114	114
Montreal	19	18	3	41	122	136
Detroit	18	18	4	40	110	128
Buffalo	15	21	5	35	126	140

Metropolitan Division

	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Washington	26	10	4	56	148	108
New Jersey	25	15	3	53	137	109
Carolina	24	15	2	50	137	117
Columbus	18	17	6	42	141	148
Pittsburgh	17	17	8	42	128	156
Philadelphia	17	19	5	39	125	147
N.Y. Rangers	18	20	2	38	117	128
N.Y. Islanders	15	18	7	37	108	128

Western Conference

Central Division

	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Winnipeg	28	12	2	58	152	106
Minnesota	26	11	4	56	127	111
Dallas	25	13	1	51	128	99
Colorado	25	15	1	51	140	131
St. Louis	19	19	4	42	118	129
Utah	17	15	7	41	113	118
Nashville	13	21	7	33	100	128
Chicago	13	25	2	28	102	137

Pacific Division

	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA
Vegas	28	9	3	59	143	107
Edmonton	25	12	3	53	132	109
L.A. Kings	23	10	5	51	118	96
Vancouver	18	12	9	45	120	126
Calgary	19	14	7	45	108	122
Anaheim	17	18	5	39	103	121
Seattle	17	21	3	37	118	130
San Jose	13	24	6	32	112	153

NOTE: Two points for a win, one for OT loss.

Monday's Games

Buffalo 4, Washington 3, SO
Montreal 5, Vancouver 4, OT
Colorado 3, Florida 1
New Jersey 3, Seattle 2

Tuesday's Scores

Edmonton 4, Boston 0
Detroit 3, Ottawa 2, OT
Dallas 5, N.Y. Rangers 4, OT
Columbus 4, Pittsburgh 3, SO
Tampa Bay 3, Carolina 2
Toronto 3, Philadelphia 2
Minnesota 6, St. Louis 4
Winnipeg 5, Nashville 2
Calgary 3, Anaheim 2, OT
Vegas 4, San Jose 2

Wednesday's Games

Vancouver at Washington, 7:30 p.m.
Colorado at Chicago, 7:30 p.m.
Florida at Utah, 10 p.m.
Calgary at L.A. Kings, 10:30 p.m.

Thursday's Games

Buffalo at Ottawa, 7 p.m.
Boston at Tampa Bay, 7 p.m.
New Jersey at N.Y. Rangers, 7 p.m.
Dallas at Philadelphia, 7 p.m.
Edmonton at Pittsburgh, 7 p.m.
Seattle at Columbus, 7 p.m.
Toronto at Carolina, 7:30 p.m.
Anaheim at St. Louis, 8 p.m.
Colorado at Minnesota, 8 p.m.
N.Y. Islanders at Vegas, 10 p.m.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Monday's Game

FCS Championship

North Dakota State 35, Montana State 32

College Football Playoff Matchups

Semifinals

Thursday

Capital One Orange Bowl

Notre Dame vs Penn State at Miami Gardens, 7:30 p.m.

Friday

Goodyear Cotton Bowl Classic

Ohio State vs Texas at Arlington, 7:30 p.m.

Monday, Jan. 20

CFP National Championship

at Atlanta, 7:30 p.m.

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Tuesday's Men's Scores

East

Morgan St. 102, North Carolina Central 98
Ohio 88, Buffalo 79
Duke 76, Pittsburgh 47
Syracuse 62, Georgia Tech 55
Arizona 75, West Virginia 56
North Carolina 82, SMU 67

Southeast

Louisville 74, Clemson 64
Florida 73, Tennessee 43
Georgia 82, Kentucky 69
UAB 81, Tulane 69
Mississippi State 76, Vanderbilt 64

Midwest

St. John's 82, Xavier 72
Kent State 68, Northern Illinois 50
Toledo 90, Eastern Michigan 87
Akron 87, Central Michigan 71
Miami (OH) 80, Ball State 72
Bowling Green 83, Western Michigan 79
Iowa 97, Nebraska 87
Iowa State 82, Utah 59
Marquette 74, Georgetown 66
UIC 80, Missouri State 63
SIUE 60, Eastern Illinois 57
Missouri 83, LSU 67

West

Baylor 68, Cincinnati 48
Oklahoma State 79, Kansas State 66
Tulsa 82, UTSA 77
Auburn 87, Texas 82
Texas Tech 72, BYU 67
Colorado State 91, Fresno State 64
Michigan 94, UCLA 75
New Mexico 61, Wyoming 53
Utah State 85, San Jose State 78
Boise State 81, UNLV 59

USA TODAY Sports Coaches Poll

Jan. 6

The USA TODAY Sports Men's Basketball Coaches Poll is conducted weekly throughout the regular season using a panel of head coaches at Division I schools. The panel is chosen in consultation with the National Association of Basketball Coaches. The voters represent each of the 32 Division I conferences that receive an automatic bid to the NCAA tournament. Each coach submits a Top 25 with a first-place vote worth 25 points, second place 24, and so on down to one point for 25th, with first-place votes in parenthesis.

	Record	Pts	Prv.
1. Tennessee (21)	14-0	765	1
2. Auburn (10)	13-1	749	2
3. Iowa State	12-1	711	3
4. Duke	12-2	670	4
5. Alabama	12-2	651	6
6. Marquette	13-2	581	8
7. Kentucky	12-2	560	11
8. Florida	13-1	529	5
9. Texas A&M	12-2	488	12
10. UConn	12-3	461	13
11. Houston	10-3	454	14
12. Kansas	10-3	438	7
13. Mississippi St.	13-1	372	16
14. Michigan St.	12-2	350	15
15. Illinois	11-3	300	20
16. Oklahoma	13-1	287	10
17. Oregon	13-2	284	9
18. Gonzaga	12-4	246	19
19. Purdue	11-4	228	22
20. Memphis	12-3	192	25
21. UCLA	11-3	147	18
22. Ole Miss	12-2	119	23
23. West Virginia	11-2	110	NR
24. Michigan	11-3	98	NR
25. Utah State	14-1	73	NR

Others receiving votes: Baylor 49; Cincinnati 38; Pittsburgh 32; San Diego State 25; St. John's 24; Clemson 10; Maryland 9; Georgia 5; Nebraska 4; Arizona 4; Wisconsin 3; Vanderbilt 3; Indiana 3; UC San Diego 1; Texas Tech 1; Arkansas 1.

USA TODAY Sports Women's Coaches Poll

Jan. 7

The USA TODAY Sports women's basketball coaches poll is conducted weekly throughout the regular season using a panel of head coaches at Division I schools. The panel is chosen by the Women's Basketball Coaches Association. The members represent each of the 32 Division I conferences that receive an automatic bid to the NCAA tournament. Each coach submits a Top 25 with a first-place vote worth 25 points, second place 24, and so on down to one point for 25th, with first-place votes in parenthesis.

	Record	Pts	Prv.
1. UCLA (31)	15-0	775	1
2. S. Carolina	14-1	741	2
3. Notre Dame	12-2	694	3
4. LSU	17-0	659	4
5. USC	14-1	654	5
6. Texas	15-1	630	6
7. Maryland	14-0	590	7
8. UConn	13-2	550	8
9. Ohio State	14-0	534	9
10. Kansas St.	15-1	480	11
11. Oklahoma	13-2	448	10
12. TCU	15-1	444	12
13. Georgia Tech	15-0	405	14
14. Duke	12-3	347	15
15. Tennessee	13-1	341	13
16. Kentucky	13-1	317	16
17. West Virginia	12-2	263	18
18. N. Carolina	13-3	230	17
19. NC State	11-3	215	19
19. Alabama	15-1	215	20
21. Michigan St.	12-2	163	21
22. Utah	12-2	86	NR
23. Iowa	12-3	82	22
24. Florida St.	13-2	58	NR
25. California	14-2	43	23

Others receiving votes: Baylor 34; Ole Miss 20; Vanderbilt 16; Minnesota 11; Michigan 9; Saint Joseph's 8; South Dakota State 5; Harvard 2; Creighton 2; Seton Hall 1; Nebraska 1; George Mason 1; FGCU 1.

GOLF

PGA Tour Schedule

Jan. 9-12 – Sony Open in Hawaii, Honolulu
Jan. 16-19 – The American Express, La Quinta, Calif.
Jan. 22-25 – Farmers Insurance Open, La Jolla, Calif.
Jan. 30-Feb. 2 – AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am, Pebble Beach, Calif.
Feb. 6-9 – WM Phoenix Open, Scottsdale, Ariz.
Feb. 13-16 – The Genesis Invitational, Pacific Palisades, Calif.
Feb. 20-23 – Mexico Open at VidantaWorld, Vallarta, Mexico
Feb. 27-March 2 – Cognizant Classic in The Palm Beaches, Palm Beach Gardens, Fla.
March 6-9 – Arnold Palmer Invitational presented by Mastercard, Orlando, Fla.
March 6-9 – Puerto Rico Open, Rio Grande, Puerto Rico
March 13-16 – The Players Championship, Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla.
March 20-23 – Valspar Championship, Palm Harbor, Fla.
March 27-30 – Texas Children's Houston Open, Houston
April 3-6 – Valero Texas Open, San Antonio, Texas
April 10-13 – Masters Tournament, Augusta, Ga.
April 17-20 – Corales Puntacana Championship, Punta Cana, Dominican Republic
April 17-20 – RBC Heritage, Hilton Head Island, SC
April 24-27 – Zurich Classic of New Orleans, Avondale, La.
May 1-4 – The CJ Cup Byron Nelson, McKinney, Texas
May 8-11 – Myrtle Beach Classic, Myrtle Beach, SC
May 8-11 – Truist Championship, Montgomery, Pa.
May 15-18 – PGA Championship, Charlotte, NC
May 22-25 – Charles Schwab Challenge, Fort Worth, Texas
May 29-June 1 – The Memorial Tournament presented by Workday, Dublin, Ohio

LPGA Tour Schedule

Jan. 30-Feb. 2 – Hilton Grand Vacations Tournament of Champions, Orlando, Fla.
Feb. 6-9 – Founders Cup, Bradenton, Fla.
Feb. 20-23 – Honda LPGA Thailand, Pattaya, Thailand
Feb. 27-March 2 – HSBC Women's World Championship, Sentosa, Singapore
March 6-9 – Blue Bay LPGA, Hainan Island, China PR
March 20-23 – Fir Hills Seri Pak Championship, Palos Verdes Estates, Calif.
March 27-30 – Ford Championship presented by Wild Horse Pass, Chandler, Ariz.
April 2-6 – T-Mobile Match Play presented by MGM Rewards, North Las Vegas, Nev.
April 17-20 – JM Eagle LA Championship presented by Plastpro, Los Angeles
April 24-27 – The Chevron Championship, The Woodlands, Texas
May 1-4 – Black Desert Championship, Ivins, Utah
May 8-11 – Mizuho Americas Open, Jersey City, NJ
May 22-25 – Mayakoba Open, Playa del Carmen, Mexico
May 29-June 1 – U.S. Women's Open presented by Ally, Hartford, Wis.

TRANSACTIONS

Tuesday's Transactions

BASEBALL

Major League Baseball

CHICAGO WHITE SOX – Bobby Dalbec Signed to a Minor League Contract.
HOUSTON ASTROS – Zack Short Signed to a Minor League Contract.
SAN DIEGO PADRES – Rodolfo Duran Signed to a Minor League Contract.
TAMPA BAY RAYS – Drew Rasmussen Signed two-year contract extension.

FOOTBALL

National Football League

ARIZONA CARDINALS – DT P.J. Mustipher signed. DE Anthony Goodlow signed.
BALTIMORE RAVENS – WR Makai Polk signed to Atlanta Falcons.
CHICAGO BEARS – RB Royce Freeman practice squad addition to Los Angeles Rams. TE Jordan Murray signed.
CINCINNATI BENGALS – LB Craig Young signed. WR Kendric Pryor signed. G Tashawn Manning signed. S Jaylen Key signed. S PJ Jules signed. DE Raymond Johnson III signed. T Andrew Coker signed. WR Cole Burgess signed. CB Nate Brooks signed. RB Gary Brightwell signed. CB Micah Abraham signed.
DALLAS COWBOYS – RB Ezekiel Elliott practice squad addition to Los Angeles Chargers.
HOUSTON TEXANS – LB Jacob Phillips signed to Indianapolis Colts.
KANSAS CITY CHIEFS – LB Blake Lynch practice squad deletion. WR Montrell Washington practice squad addition.
LAS VEGAS RAIDERS – DT Tyler Manoa signed.
LOS ANGELES CHARGERS – WR Laviska Shenault Jr. practice squad deletion. RB Ezekiel Elliott practice squad addition.
LOS ANGELES RAMS – S Quindell Johnson practice squad deletion. RB Royce Freeman practice squad addition. RB Blake Corum Placed on IR fractured right forearm.
MIAMI DOLPHINS – TE Hayden Rucci signed. LB Derrick McLendon signed. T Bayron Matos signed International Player Pathway Program. CB Jason Maitre signed. CB Isaiah Johnson signed. LB Dequan Jackson signed. C Chasen Hines signed. T Ryan Hayes signed. DT Neil Farrell signed. S Jordan Colbert signed. LB William Bradley-King signed. WR Tarik Black signed.
MINNESOTA VIKINGS – QB Daniel Jones Activated from the Practice Squad. QB Brett Rypien cut.
NEW ENGLAND PATRIOTS – DT Haggai Ndubuisi practice squad addition to Washington Commanders.
NEW YORK GIANTS – TE Jordan Murray signed to Chicago Bears. T Jalen McKenzie signed to San Francisco 49ers. WR Isaiah Hodgins signed to San Francisco 49ers.
PHILADELPHIA EAGLES – QB Ian Book cut.
SAN FRANCISCO 49ERS – T Jalen McKenzie signed. WR Isaiah Hodgins signed. WR Russell Gage signed. T Isaac Alarcon signed.
WASHINGTON COMMANDERS – DT Haggai Ndubuisi practice squad addition. T Max Pircher practice squad deletion.

BASKETBALL

National Basketball Assoc.

OKLAHOMA CITY THUNDER – C Branden Carlson Waived.
PHILADELPHIA 76ERS – PF Pete Nance Waived.
SACRAMENTO KINGS – C Orlando Robinson Waived.
TORONTO RAPTORS – C Bruno Fernando Waived.

HOCKEY

National Hockey League

MINNESOTA WILD – G Dylan Ferguson Waived. D Carson Lambos Sent to minors Iowa-AHL. C Brendan Gaunce Sent to minors Iowa-AHL. G Dylan Ferguson Signed as Free Agent One-year, two-way contract.
NASHVILLE PREDATORS – RW Ozzy Wiesblatt Sent to minors Milwaukee-AHL.
NEW YORK ISLANDERS – D Grant Hutton Called up from minors from Bridgeport-AHL.
NEW YORK RANGERS – RW Matt Rempe Called up from minors from Hartford-AHL.
OTTAWA SENATORS – D Maxence Guenette Called up from minors from Belleville-AHL.
SEATTLE KRAKEN – C Mitchell Stephens Called up from minors from Coachella Valley-AHL. C Ben Meyers Sent to minors Coachella Valley-AHL.

TENNIS ROUNDUP

Upset in Adelaide, day for the ages in Auckland

FIELD LEVEL MEDIA

Serbian Miomir Kecmanovic upset sixth-seeded Alexander Bublik of Kazakhstan 6-4, 6-2 in opening-round action at the Adelaide International in Australia on Tuesday

Bublik was the only seeded player in action to lose Tuesday. Advancing were seventh-seeded Brandon Nakashima, who survived a three-set match against Germany's Yannick Hanfmann, 6-1, 2-6, 6-3, and Tomas Martin Etcheverry, the eighth seed. Etcheverry, of Argentina, defeated Australian Tristan Schoolkate 7-6 (8), 6-3.

Another Aussie, Rinky Hijikata, defeated Belgium's David Goffin in straight sets. Also advancing were a pair of Frenchmen, Arthur Cazaux and Manuel Guinard, as well as American Marcos Giron.

Miomir Kecmanovic walks off the court after defeating Alexander Bublik in the second round of the Adelaide International on Tuesday.
SARAH REED/GETTY IMAGES

ASB Classic

Czech teen Jakub Mensik became the youngest player to win in the Auckland, New Zealand, tournament since 2018 when he defeated lucky loser Pablo Carreno Busta of Spain 6-2, 4-6, 7-5 in the opening round.

Mensik, 19, needed two hours, 12 minutes to seal the victory, which he punctuated with 18 aces. Next up for Mensik will be Ben Shelton, the top seed.

American Nishesh Basavareddy got his first-ever win in an ATP Tour main draw by beating lucky loser Francisco Comesana of Argentina 6-2, 6-2.

Other winners were 38-year-old Gael Monfils of France, who became the oldest winner in Auckland since 1971; Jan-Lennard Struff of Germany; Italians Luca Nardi and Lorenzo Sonego; and Mariano Navone and Facundo Diaz Acosta, both of Argentina.

Women
Adelaide International

Ons Jabeur of Tunisia overcame an early deficit to record a 7-6 (6), 6-2 win against fourth-seeded Danielle Collins in a first-round match in Australia.

Jabeur rallied from a 5-3 deficit in the first set and finished with five aces to dispatch Collins in 90 minutes.

Sixth-seeded Diana Shnaider of Russia had two aces and overcame five double faults in a 6-3, 0-6, 6-0 win over Katerina Siniakova of the Czech Republic.

No. 8 seed and defending champion Jelena Ostapenko of Latvia overcame losing the first four games of her match to secure a 4-6, 6-1, 6-1 victory over Magdalena Frech of Poland.

Hobart International

Dayana Yastremska of the Ukraine rallied to a 2-6, 6-4, 6-1 win over Katie Volynets in a first-round match in Australia.

Yastremska registered two aces to win the match in 1 hour and 58 minutes.

Second-seeded Elise Mertens of Belgium posted a 6-3, 6-1 win over Nuria Parrizas Diaz of Spain, third-seeded Amanda Anisimova notched a 6-3, 6-3 victory over Daria Saville of Australia, and fourth-seeded Magda Linette of Poland recorded a 6-3, 3-6, 6-4 win over Varvara Gracheva of France.

Unseeded Sofia Kenin rallied to a 4-6, 6-3, 6-3 win over fifth-seeded Lulu Sun of New Zealand.

GOLF PGA TOUR

Simpson remembers late friend Grayson Murray

FIELD LEVEL MEDIA

Webb Simpson and Grayson Murray were born eight years apart in the city of Raleigh, N.C.

When Simpson was a teenager with his sights set on a golf career, he met Murray for the first time. His swing coach told him there was a kid around eight or nine who was already "really good" and didn't live far from Simpson.

"I remember meeting him. He was just a classic little eight-year-old, nine-year-old golfer. Very good at the game," Simpson recalled Tuesday. "It was kind of one of these guys where you encounter good young juniors, but it's rare where a guy gets better and better. So I kept watching him and staying in touch."

Simpson started a junior tournament in 2010, and Murray was the first player to win it. Their friendship lasted till both were playing professionally on the PGA Tour.

In May of last year, four months after winning the Sony Open in Hawaii, Murray died by suicide at age 30, a shock to Simpson and the PGA Tour community.

Murray is on players' minds this week in Honolulu as they prepare to play the Sony Open without its defending champion.

"I miss him a ton," Simpson said. "I think, you know, when it happens it's fresh on your mind and you think about it for days and weeks. You don't stop thinking about it.

"But as time goes on, you know, life goes on, and then you have these moments a year after he won where we get to remember just his win, his life, what he meant to so many people."

Murray's family came to Hawaii this week as the PGA Tour helped put together a celebration of life for the late golfer, who during his life was open about his struggles with depression and addiction.

His parents, Eric and Terry Murray, also announced the launch of the Grayson Murray Foundation that will focus on mental health and addiction awareness.

Simpson said it was "very fitting" to have the celebration of life at the site of Murray's last victory on tour.

Webb Simpson pitches onto the 11th green during the first round of the 2024 U.S. Open in Pinehurst, N.C.
JIM DEDMON/USA TODAY SPORTS

"I can only imagine how hard it must be to lose a child, to even understand what they're going through," Simpson said of Murray's parents. "I hope I don't have to ever go through that. But I think, I hope that they could see how celebrated he was this morning. I was really encouraged with how many guys came, players, caddies, PGA Tour staff, media. I think it was a great outpouring of love for Grayson."

Simpson added that he, Murray and a few others got together for a "really special dinner" at Pebble Beach several weeks after Murray's Sony victory.

"Just reflected on his life, where he had come from, the trials he had gone through," Simpson shared Tuesday. "And then, you know, winning out here can change your life so quickly, and I don't know how confident he was on winning when he got here Monday, Tuesday that week, but he won and it really set up his year, got him in the Masters. He was about to get married, and so all this great stuff was happening in his life.

"So it's hard to remember those and not be like immediately reminded of the sadness of what happened in May. But also don't want to forget those were like real moments of joy and real moments where he experienced some great things in life."